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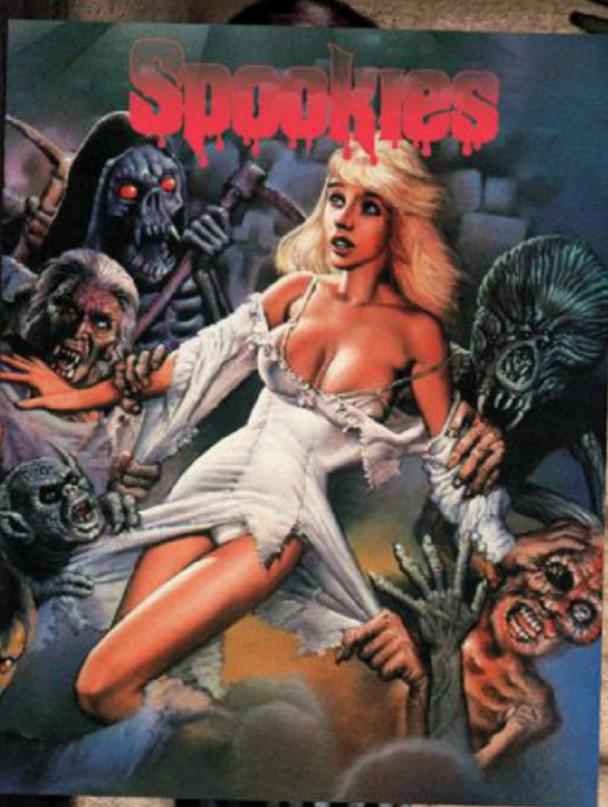
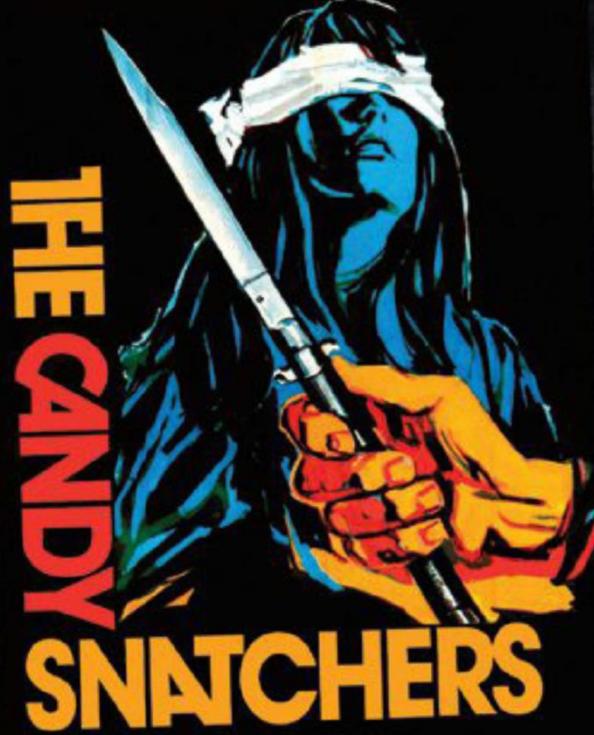
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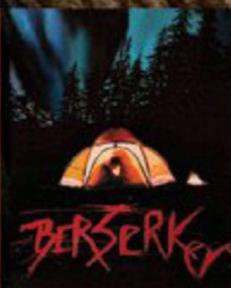
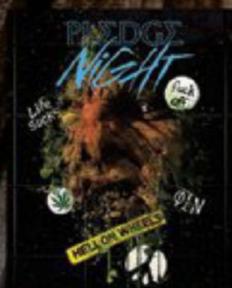
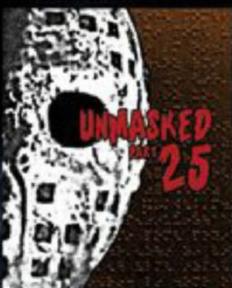
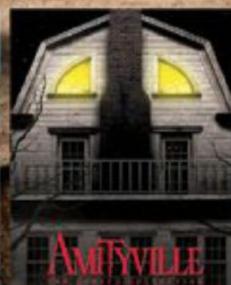
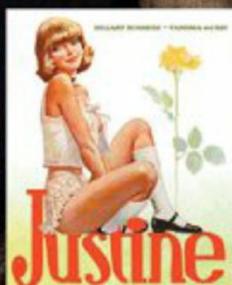
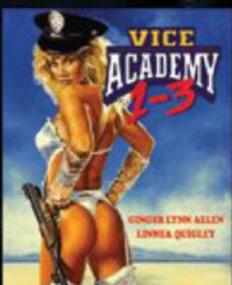
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### Dedicated to the Memory and Living Legacy of Robert Forster

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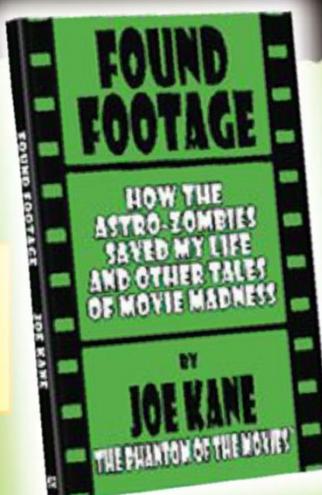
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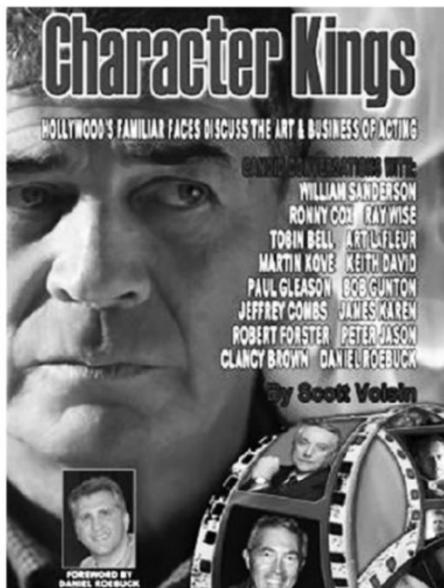
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# The Phantom Speaks!

**WINTER CHILLS A GO-GO!:** Welcome to 2020, which, if nothing else, should be a great year for hindsight. Like many an annum before it, this one begins with winter, and we acknowledge that icy season with a celebration of some choice vintage movie chills. Our dynamic dad/daughter duo and Cult Radio A Go-Go masterminds, Terry & Tiffany DuFoe, talk with cinematic jack-of-all-trades Gary Kent, actor (**Satan's Sadists**), stuntman (from **The Shooting to Bubba Ho-Tep**), author (**Shadows & Light**), and auteur (his 1976 film **The Pyramid** aired on **TCM Underground** this November past), whose life and times are explored in the new documentary feature **Danger God** from Wild Eye Releasing. Rob Freese takes us back to genre-video's roots via a chat with VHS pioneer Greg Luce, whose still-active Sinister Cinema label has fed the appetites of offbeat-movie fans for over 35 years, and reviews some choice drive-in double features, slasher films, and genre indies. David-Elijah Nahmod surveys several backdate Hammer winners accorded lavish Blu-ray special editions from the horror specialists at Scream Factory.

Elsewhere in this ish, our far-flung cine-correspondent Joseph Perry reports on fresh genre films screened at fests unfolding in London, Bucheon, South Korea, Austin, TX, and Ft. Lauderdale, FL; actor Bill Timoney recounts his adventures on the set of Martin Scorsese's latest crime epic **The Irishman**; and **Star Trek**'s once and future Lt. Uhura, Nichelle Nichols, recalls the iconic kiss shared with William Shatner's Captain Kirk that shattered a longstanding television taboo. And, it goes virtually sans saying, our ever-opinionated cast of columnists and critix express their views re all things genre.

**OBIT ORBIT:** Among the far too many notables cut down by The Reaper's furiously swinging scythe since last we convened, we were especially saddened by two. Robert Forster, 78, was not only a tremendous actor whose trademark laid-back charisma elevated scores of often otherwise mediocre movies but a genuinely great guy whose company we were privileged to enjoy on more than one occasion. We counted ourselves among the many well-wishers thrilled when he earned a Best Actor in a Supporting Role Oscar nomination for his brilliant turn as world-weary bail bondsman Max Cherry in Quentin Tarantino's 1997 Elmore Leonard adaptation **Jackie Brown**. Author Nick Tosches, 69, of **Hellfire**, **Dino** and **Trinities** fame, was a friend since the '70s and shared his passion for his fave film, **Nightmare**



Late, great character king Robert Forster.

**Alley**, in these pages back in **VS** #10. Nick was preparing a bio of **Alley** author William Lindsay Gresham at the time of his premature demise.

The acting ranks were further thinned by the loss of Claudine (**Thunderball**) Auger, 78, Danny Aiello, 86, Rene Auberjonois, 79, Diahann Carroll, 84, Dianne Foster, 90, Julie Gibson, 106, Steve (**Blood Freak**) Hawkes, age unreported, David (**The Fly**) Hedison, 92, Godard starlet Anna (**Band of Outsiders**) Karina, 79, Ron Leibman, 82, Virginia (**The Brain That Wouldn't Die**) Leith, 94, Carol (**Bunny Lake Is Missing**) Lynley, 77, Jan Merlin, 94, Victor (**Johnny Firecloud**) Mohica, 86, Michael J. Pollard, 80, Joan Staley, 79, and Robert (**Easy Rider**) Walker Jr., 79, among too many others. Also departing were drummer extraordinaire Ginger Baker, 80, actor/mogul Robert (**The Fiend Who Walked the West**) Evans, 89, **Star Trek** writer D.C. Fontana, 80, composer Igo Kantor, 89, director Arthur (**Detroit 9000**) Marks, 92, acidic critic John Simon, 94, "camp and confetti" comic Rip (**Amazon Women on the Moon**) Taylor, 88, and cartoonist Gahan Wilson, 89. Fortunately for us, their legacies will be readily accessed and enjoyed far into the future.

**PHLATSCREEN PHLASHES:** Among the recommended movies we caught during the run-up to press time, we especially enjoyed new Blu-ray editions of John Carpenter's 1986 **Big Trouble in Little China** (Shout! Factory), Chuck Russell's 1988 **The Blob** reboot (Scream Factory), and William Richert's dark conspiracy thriller **Winter Kills** (Kino



Lorber Films), all three arriving with a wealth of fascinating, fully immersive extras. Kino also issues a brace of cheesy but fun fantasy chestnuts, Bert I. (Mr. B.I.G.) Gordon's 1962 **The Magic Sword**, featuring an over-the-top Basil Rathbone as an evil wizard and an under-the-radar Maila (Vampira) Nurmi as "The Hag," and Mario Bava's candy-colored sword-and-sandal saga **Hercules in the Haunted World** (1963), with a ripped Reg Park and a lean Chris Lee. In the streaming arena, we discovered a trio of backdate British crime gems set in London's seedier sectors—Jack Hawkins in the **Dragnet**-like **The Long Arm** (1956), Belinda Lee in the twisty nail-biter **The Secret Place** (1957), and the intense, hard-edged **Never Let Go** (1960), with a frightfully convincing Peter Sellers as a psycho gangster. For truly old-school thrills, we time-tripped to the early '40s for two Technicolor adventures, Maria Montez as twin sisters supported by Jon Hall, Lon Chaney, and Sabu in Robert Siodmak's **Cobra Woman**, and Albert Dekker as the eponymous people-shrinker in Ernest B. (King Kong) Schoedsack's **Dr. Cyclops**, both via Kino, and, from VCI Entertainment, the lively 1946 B&W serial **Lost City of the Jungle**, with Lionel Atwill, Russell Hayden, and Keye Luke as a then-rare Asian hero. We also revisited a worthy Blu-ray pair from Warner Archive, Hitchcock's unobtrusively 3-D mystery **Dial M for Murder** (1954), with a classy Grace Kelly and a caddish Ray Milland, and the 1973 TV chiller **Don't Be Afraid of the Dark**.

**DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS:** The caption on page 34 of **VS** #112 erroneously identifies Brett Halsey's spaghetti western alias as Montgomery Wood. That should have read Montgomery Ford. Montgomery Wood was, of course, the well-established pasta prairie handle of actor Giuliano Gemma.

**NEVER METAPHOR WE DIDN'T LIKE DEPT.:** Returning to the world of contempo films, our Critical Cinemetaphors of the Season honors go to the following:

"It's **Wild Strawberries** with handguns."  
Anthony Lane, *The New Yorker*,  
on **The Irishman**  
"Showgirls with fur."  
Wade Major, *CineGods.com*, on **Cats**

Couldn't have put it better. Meantime, till next time, don't forget to...

*Keep watching the screens!*



# Phantom Pheedback

## GIMME FIVE

Dear Phantom,  
Arriving in my mailbox in early October, The Fall Horror Harvest Edition of **VideoScope** (#112) contains some fine coverage befitting the trick-or-treat season. I was, however, most intrigued by the inclusion of the early '60s exploitation feature **Five Minutes to Love**, with none other than **Golden Girl** Rue McClanahan at the top of the bill. The seedy cast of characters in this grindhouse curio includes an unpleasant triad of misfits led by junkyard kingpin Harry (Paul Leder), along with brutish pothead Blowhard (King Moody) and confused, angrily philosophical, poetry-spouting Ken (Norman Hartweg) who obviously reads plenty of Nietzsche and Kerouac and William

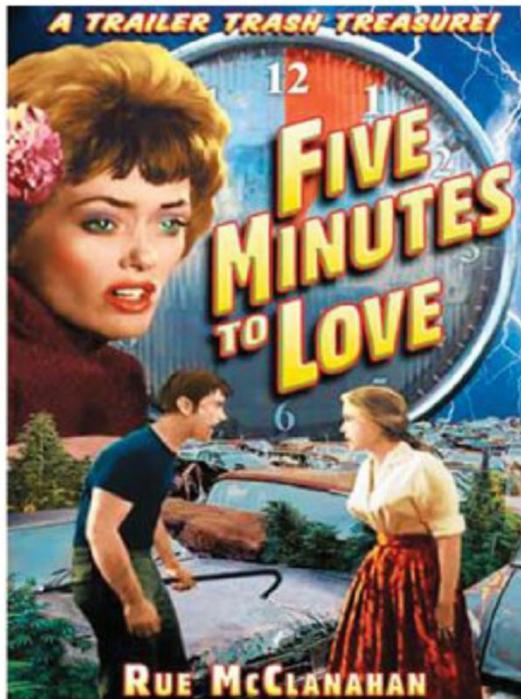
Burroughs when not stealing cars with Blowhard. Throw in a pair of crooked cops and we are left with Ben (Will Gregory) and his bride Edna (Gaye Gordon) as the only "normals" in the vicinity of the picture's stark junkyard setting. The couple's infant daughter is actually Paul Leder's real-life daughter, Geraldine Leder, who grew up to be a notable TV casting director.

Despite **Five**'s shortcomings and overall campiness, it has some strangely compelling dialogue, making it feel like, in The Phantom's words, "a bad ersatz existential Beat play committed to film." Rue McClanahan, only in her late twenties at the time, has some of the best lines in the picture as Poochie, an attractive flirt with a mild southern twang. Poochie provides beer and bedroom hospitality to junkyard customers who wander in looking for parts. Her candid "five minutes" outlook gives the film its name, as well as one of its alternate titles, **It Only Takes Five Minutes**. Adding a bit of confusion to the mix is the fact that Rue is supposedly in the similarly titled **Five Minutes to Live**, a Johnny Cash vehicle, albeit in a smaller, uncredited role. I personally have not seen her in it.

Seeing a future TV star (**Maude**, **The Golden Girls**) like McClanahan in **Five Minutes to Love** reminded me of another exploitation cheapie, **The Louisiana Hussy**, with Betty Lynn, the future TV girlfriend of Deputy Barney Fife of **The Andy Griffith Show**, in its cast. Lynn portrays Lily, the bayou tale's "good girl," opposite the titular Hussy played by Nan Peterson. (Rue McClanahan's Poochie could also be described as a hussy, although she is far more likable than Nan Peterson's hussy of a home-wrecker.)

A tawdry tale of jealousy, infidelity and

6 **VideoScope**



brother against brother, **Louisiana Hussy** lives up to its exploitative title, or at the very least up to the level of a tacky southern soap opera. Yet despite its subject matter, **Hussy** is generally optimistic and hopeful in contrast to the overwhelming sense of nihilism depicted in **Five Minutes to Love**. I don't know if **Louisiana Hussy** is on DVD or recall if it has ever been scoped out in the pages of **VS**.

Stepping away from the exploitation bins and moving over to the classic science fiction section, I enjoyed The Phantom's look at Irvin Yeaworth's **4D Man**. I certainly agree that it's a "long-neglected SF winner" and has a unique jazz score to boot. It's good to know that the Kino extras include an interview with beauty queen turned thespian Lee Meriwether. That alone makes it worth picking up a copy along the way. **4D Man**, of course, was recently featured on the cover of the Summer 2019 edition (#111) of **VideoScope**.

—Timothy Walters, Muskogee, OK

**The Louisiana Hussy** is available via Alpha Video. While **Hussy** boasts its fair share of highlights, our fave entry in the wandering wanton woman subgenre remains Russell Rouse's 1953 **Wicked Woman** (**VS** #109), starring peerless actress (and off-screen Rouse spouse) Beverly Michaels in a tale that shares a similar narrative frame and casts incomparable screen creep Percy Helton in one of his meatier roles. We've long thought Yeaworth's hitherto elusive **4D Man** seemed ripe for a big-budget studio remake, though the film definitely stands on its own merits.

## CASTING A SHADOW

Dear Phantom,  
There was a major omission in the Obit Orbit column in **VideoScope** #112: Denise Nickerson died in July of 2019. She was a relatively young 62. Most, of course, remember her as Violet Beauregarde in **Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory** but to me, and countless other **Dark Shadows** fans, she will always be Amy Jennings (Werewolf Chris Jennings' [Donald Brisce] little sister from 1968-1970) and Nora Collins (during the lengthy 1897 flashback). (Okay, fellow **DS** geeks, she was also Amy Collins for a short time in the 1970 Parallel Time storyline, just before she left the show.)

Once, Grayson Hall, one of the mainstays of **Dark Shadows** (most prominently in the role of Dr. Julia Hoffman), while she was offstage watching Ms. Nickerson flawlessly perform a lengthy monologue, said to a fellow actor, "Forty, if she's a day." (Denise was only 12 at the time!)

She will be missed.

—Alyssen Bills, Portland, ME

*Denise Nickerson joins an unfortunately expanding roster of **Dark Shadows** alums who've departed over the last few years, a roster headed by once and future Barnabas Collins Jonathan Frid. Fortunately, many others, like Kathryn Leigh Scott (**VS** #44 & 76), remain to carry on the **DS** legacy.*

## MONDO RINGO

Dear Phantom,

Fantastic issue! I had no inkling that the movie **Son of Dracula** with Ringo Starr existed. That is pretty bad, when the movie did not go into home video release. Since Ringo is in this movie, I am now curious in watching it.

—Paul Dale Roberts, via e-mail

*The fast-vanishing **Son of Dracula**, released a year before the enduring **The Rocky Horror Picture Show**, sits atop many musical horror fans' must-see lists. Not sure if music rights, current copyright ownership entanglements or a perceived lack of market interest are responsible but the time seems right for a special edition Blu-ray restoration of the title, like Shout! Factory recently accorded another '70s musical artifact **Rock 'n' Roll High School**, showcasing The Ramones.*

(continued page 27)



# The Phantom of the Movies'

## NEW RELEASE SHELF

*New release titles are followed by year, Phantom rating, director, lead actors, running time, DVD and/or Blu-ray label and release date (month and year).*

### RATINGS KEY



Couldn't be better



Excellent



Good



Not bad; worth watching



Mediocre, worthwhile for a particular thesp, director or genre



Poor but may have points of interest



Just plain bad



Even worse than that



The pits



Not available on video

N.I.D.

Not in distribution

Special thanks go to Guidance Ro-Man for his ratings symbol suggestion.



### THE YOUNG AND THE RECKLESS

THE BLACK STRING (2018)

D: Brian Hanson. Frankie Muniz, Blake Webb, Chelsea Edmунson, Richard Handley, Cullen Douglas, Colby French. 93 mins. (Lionsgate) 9/19

The Black String is a bang-up horror movie that sees Muniz, of *Agent Cody Banks* and the TV series *Malcolm in the Middle* fame, give a stunning performance as a young man who goes on a terrifying fast-track downward spiral after a mysterious blind date. A loner content with working at what he calls a "lifestyle convenience boutique," but what most of us refer to as a liquor store, Jonathan is seen as an underachiever by his well-meaning parents. His far more outgoing boss and friend Eric (Webb) coaxes him into enjoying life and taking chances, which leads Jonathan to call a singles hotline number. He goes

on a date with a woman named Dena (Edmунson) and contracts a nasty-looking rash from having unprotected sex with her. Events spin further out of control, and Jonathan commits acts of violence against himself, those few who are close to him and strangers as he loses his tenuous grip on reality. Hanson, who co-wrote the screenplay with actor Richard Handley (Andy Warrener receives a story credit), balances the intricate plot points as well as keeping viewers guessing about whether Jonathan is the victim of witchcraft or is suffering a mental breakdown. Muniz shows a wide range here as his character goes from shy-guy slacker to what seems like a raving lunatic. A scene in which Jonathan tries to extract the titular substance out of his arm is particularly unsettling in this superb supernatural/body horror film that boasts paranoia thriller and film noir elements.

—Joseph Perry

### BLISS (2019)

D: Joe Begos. Dora Madison, Tru Collins, Rhys Wakefield, Jeremy Gardner, Graham Skipper, David McKenna. 80 mins. (Dark Sky Films) 11/19

Oy! These kids today with their sex, drugs and death metal! Not to mention murder, mutilation and messes made. No wonder the landlord complains. At the vortex of this violent madness and mayhem is our dubious heroine Dezzy (Madison), an abundantly unpleasant El Lay artist who's unable to complete her current canvas. To get her creative juices roiling, Dezzy develops a serious jones for the titular drug, a seeming mix of acid, meth, and unadulterated death wish. The remainder of this mercifully brief outing sees Dezzy descend into a maelstrom of bad trips, binge bloodsucking, and toxic self-indulgence so audiovisually assaultive that it made us long for the kinder, gentler freak-outs of yore, like the aptly named Richard Rush's *Psych-Out* or Roger Corman's *The Trip*. *Bliss* ultimately morphs into a post-modern vampire tale, sort of an Abel Ferrera's



similarly druggy *The Addiction* (VS #18) on steroids, further augmented by heaps of gore smothered in hoary hipster cliches. For us, Jim Jarmusch's brilliant and infinitely quieter *Only Lovers Left Alive* (VS #92) remains the last word on creativity and vampirism. On the up side, Madison turns in impressively intense work as the tortured artiste, while *Cheers* alum Wendt surprises in a change-of-pace role as an aged degenerate, and Gardner lends deft support as Dezzy's relatively stable bartender friend Clive. (Spoiler Alert: "This film contains flashing images that may cause discomfort or trigger seizures for people with photosensitive epilepsy.") Meantime, auteur Begos returns with the siege thriller *VFW*, featuring *Bliss* alums Madison and Wendt, backed by a veritable cornucopia of character kings, including William Sadler, Stephen Lang, Martin Kove, David Patrick Kelly, and Fred (The Hammer) Williamson. Stay tuned!

—The Phantom

## CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

### GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS (2019)

D: Michael Dougherty. Kyle Chandler, Vera Farmiga, Millie Bobby Brown, Bradley Whitford, Sally Hawkins, Charles Dance, Thomas Middleditch, Aisha Hinds, O'Shea Jackson Jr., David Strathairn, Ken Watanabe, Zhang Ziyi. 132 mins. (Warner Home Entertainment) 8/19

Set five years after the events of 2014's **Godzilla** (VS #82), the new story follows the efforts of the cryptozoological agency Monarch as its members face off against a battery of god-sized monsters, dubbed Titans. It centers on the Russell family, Monarch researchers who lost their son, Andrew, during the battle between Godzilla and the MUTOs in San Francisco. Dr. Mark Russell (Chandler) has left the agency, while his now ex-wife Emma (Farmiga) and teenaged daughter Madison (Brown) are stationed in China, where they monitor the Titan named Mothra, which is about to hatch from its egg. Emma has developed ORCA, a means of influencing the Titans' behaviors. After she successfully uses it to calm the newly hatched Mothra, Emma and Madison are kidnapped by eco-terrorist Alan Jonah (Dance), who wants to free all of the Titans to "restore balance" to Earth. Mark is alerted to his family's kidnapping by Dr. Serizawa (Watanabe) of Monarch and is brought in to help trace the ORCA, which he had initially helped develop. Jonah brings the Russells to Antarctica, where he unleashes the Titan code-named Monster Zero. This three-headed winged creature is a rival Alpha to Godzilla. During an attempt to rescue them, Mark discovers that Emma is actually working with Jonah! Soon other Titans are unleashed, including Rodan and the newly transformed Mothra. More Titans are awakened by the call of Monster Zero (aka King Ghidorah), whom Godzilla must battle for dominance over the other Titans. With the future of Earth in the balance, Monarch concludes they must join the fight against Godzilla's three-headed nemesis.

This sequel to Gareth Edwards' 2014 "global reboot" **Godzilla** (VS #93) continues the more "realistic" approach to giant monster movies but injects some of the fun that was missing from that first entry. The monster battles are frequent and furious. Motion-capture performances were used for all of the monsters (except Mothra), so the man-in-a-suit concept has been updated. (This was also done in Toho's 2016 **Shin-Godzilla** and Jordan Vogt-Roberts' 2017 **Kong: Skull Island**.) The monsters are far more integral to the plot, and we learn something of their backgrounds. The human characters have a little more to do than just observe the action this time out. And we get some pretty major



destruction scenes in key American cities. (With 18 Titans spread across the globe, destruction in other countries is mostly just hinted at.)

Extras include **Monsters 101**, focusing on the four main Titans, Godzilla ("Nature's Fearsome Guardian"), Mothra ("Queen of the Monsters"), Ghidorah ("The Living Extinction Machine") and Rodan ("Airborne God of Fire"); **Evolution of the Titans**, examining the visual effects and tools used to develop the same four characters; **Monarch in Action**, a look at the major settings from the film: Yunnan Temple, Castle Bravo, the Antarctic base, the Isla de Maro volcano, and Godzilla's undersea lair; and **Millie Bobby Brown: Force of Nature**. In other featurettes, **Monster Tech: Monarch Joins the Fight** explores the real and invented military-grade technology seen on-screen; **Monsters Are Real** attempts to bridge the gap between mythology and real life; and **Welcome to the Monsterverse** offers broader looks at **Godzilla** and **Kong: Skull Island**. Also included are deleted and extended scenes, theatrical trailers, and a commentary with director Michael Dougherty, producer Zack Shields, and actor O'Shea Jackson, Jr.

**Godzilla: KOTM** was a box-office disappointment for Warner, yet it's a better film than the studio's **Godzilla**. It may have catered too much to kaiju-eiga fans, sacrificing a more mainstream appeal. With Brown and Chandler set to return for **Godzilla vs. Kong** in March 2020 for director Adam Wingard, we can't say WB isn't trying its damnedest to make this Monsterverse franchise work.

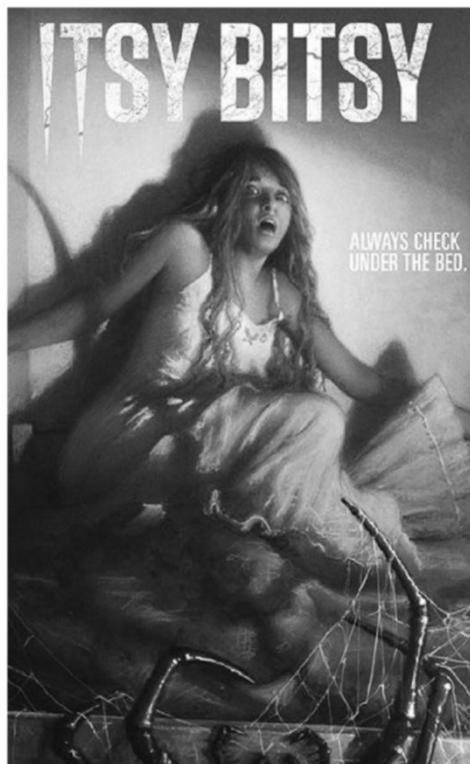
—Dan Cziraky

### ITSY BITSY (2019)

D: Micah Gallo. Bruce Davison, Elizabeth Roberts, Denise Crosby, Arman Darbo, Chloe Perrin, Treva Etienne. 94 mins. (Shout! Factory) 10/19

**Itsy Bitsy** reps the latest offering in the oversized-spiders subgenre. Though the film tries to add some new elements to the arachnid chiller subgenre, it is still at its best when operating as a straight-up creature feature. Single mom Kara Spencer (Roberts) has been floating from one short-term nursing job to another since she started self-medicating after the death of one of her children. She moves to a new town with teenaged son Jesse (Darbo) and younger daughter Cambria (Perrin) to act as the live-in caregiver for Walter Clark (genre-film vet Davison), a recently widowed former anthropologist and wealthy collector of antiques, some of which have been acquired by shadowy means. When Clark's former assistant Ahkeeba (Etienne) tries to gift the collector with the stolen Black Egg of Maa-Kalaratri but then breaks it, he releases spider larvae of a possibly black-magical strain. One of these creatures grows ever larger the more it eats and begins terrorizing the Spencers. The acting is solid throughout, with interesting characters and backstories. The mostly practical spider and gooey gore effects are wonderful and constitute the main draw here. Gallo, making his directorial debut after more than a decade in visual effects and post-production, helms with a nice balance of spider suspense and family drama. Fans of indie creature features that work hard to offer original angles would do well to check out **Itsy Bitsy**. Extras include filmmaker commentaries, making-of featurettes, storyboard gallery and more.

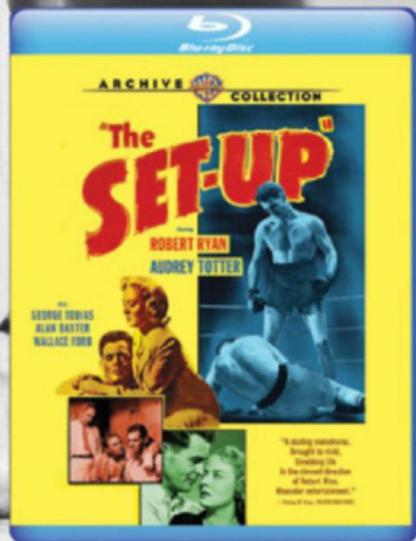
—Joseph Perry



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## COLD DISH THEATER

### VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY (2017)

888

D: Johnny Martin. Nicolas Cage, Anna Hutchinson, Tabitha Bateman, Deborah Kara Unger, Don Johnson, Charlene Tilton. 99 mins. (MVD Visual) 3/19

One expects a "rape 'n' revenge" drama, featuring faded icons such as Cage and Johnson, to be a routine hack-job genre release. The source material here is the novel **Rape: A Love Story** by the respected author Joyce Carol Oates, adapted by screenwriter John Manciewicz. Their story follows single mom Teena's (Hutchinson) efforts to obtain justice after a July 4th gang-rape in front of her daughter (Bateman). When toxic mama Irma Vick (Tilton) hires legal pitbull Jay Kirkpatrick (Johnson) to defend her two accused sons, case officer John Dromoer (Cage) turns avenger. Since Dromoer is a veteran hero cop, he outclasses civilian vigilantes. They are satisfied with merely eliminating criminals; the cop dispatches his targets in a manner that financially ruins their enabling parents. People who remember Tilton as "Lucy from **Dallas**" will marvel at her ability to communicate pure evil. Johnson's performance may hearten fans who saw him bottom out in **Bucky Larson: Born to Be a Star**. Boomers who recall Cage as **Valley Girl**'s punk boyfriend can decide whether they prefer him as a defender of Truth, Justice and the American Way.



### WRONGED (2019) 88

D: Nicholas Holland. Shaun O'Malley, Angela Roberts-Johnson, Matthew Siman, Wayne E. Brown, Garrett Thierry, Joe Piazza, Dan Davies. 91 mins. (Indican Pictures) 12/19

Sometimes a practical suggestion can go utterly, horribly wrong. Dr. Clark (Brown) has to treat David (O'Malley), a father whose response to his wife's (Roberts-Johnson) miscarriage threatens to erode their relationship. The solution? A wilderness vacation with other members of their family. The catch? A dangerous criminal gang has business in the area and will not hesitate to brutally eliminate potential witnesses. The result? Inevitable conflict, surprising savagery. Toes are amputated, a man's groin is eviscerated by a chainsaw, and his leader's facial features are erased, among other atrocities. The gore is offset with expository dialogue that may convince viewers that the mayhem is not mindless. O'Malley looks buff enough to play the hero and has sufficient talent to showcase his character's flawed personality. Siman's arch Welsh accent adds a menacing edge to his bad-ass. People may still wonder what an Australian is doing in the northeast American wilderness. This is not an indie **Deliverance**; no one is forced to squeal, an uncharacteristic sign of restraint in this over-the-top production.

—Ronald C. Epstein

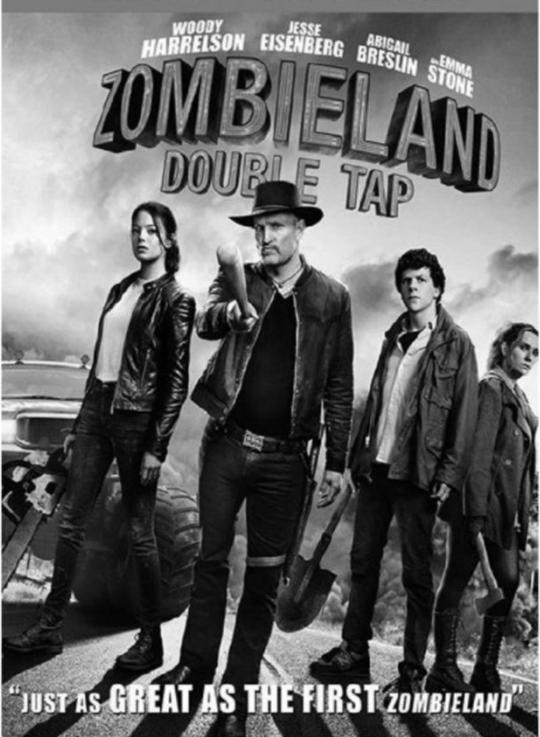
### NIGHT OF THE LAUGHING DEAD ZOMBIELAND: DOUBLE TAP

(2019) 88 1/2

D: Rueben Fleischer. Woody Harrelson, Jesse Eisenberg, Emma Stone, Abigail Breslin, Zoey Deutch, Rosario Dawson. 99 mins. (Sony Pictures) 1/20

It's 10 years later and Zombieland is still a wasteland littered with the walking dead. We find Tallahassee (Harrelson), Columbus (Eisenberg), Wichita (Stone) and Little Rock (Breslin) living in domestic bliss in the White House. Columbus and Wichita are a thing, while Tallahassee has become a dysfunctional father figure for the unappreciative Little Rock, who just wants to get out and be around kids her own age. Everything falls apart when Columbus asks Wichita to marry him. Ten years they've survived together and her instinct is still to leave a goodbye note and take off with Little Rock in the middle of the night when she doesn't want to face commitment. Blowing off steam at a mall, Columbus finds Madison (Deutch) in a candle store and becomes his rebound girl. Wichita arrives back home for weapons after being

BLU-RAY + DVD + DIGITAL



ditched by Little Rock for a hippie musician and the promise of a tranquil life in Babylon, a commune of peace-loving young people. They hit the road and track her to an Elvis hotel/museum run by Nevada (Dawson), who falls for Tallahassee. Doppelgängers of Tallahassee and Columbus (played by Luke Wilson and Thomas Middleditch) arrive and throw in to help battle T-800 zombies, so named for being nearly impossible to kill. The road to Babylon is paved with much blood and many dead things. This is a near-perfect sequel in that fans are given everything they loved about the first film in a fast-paced, spastic 99 minutes. Unfortunately, there's nothing new here, the characters haven't evolved beyond the first film, and the big joke of the doppelgängers was done better in **Shaun of the Dead** (as well as a classic episode of **Seinfeld**). It's pretty obvious there was no more story left, so they just remade the first movie. And not to say there's nothing funny here. There are a number of big laughs, the best being a mid-credit scene showing the first day of the zombie breakout (where the film reaches the hysterical heights of the original), but mostly it's just a comfortable sameness that settles in, just watching characters we love doing the exact same things they did the first go-round. Deutch and Dawson are great additions and both have some wonderful little moments. If you're a fan of the original, I predict you'll be a fan of **Double Tap**, but I do think the Zombie Movie Apocalypse should draw to a close now and let that genre shamble to the cinematic graveyard and take the next decade or two off until some fresh ideas can be pumped into its rotting carcass. ♀

—Rob Freese

## BEST OF THE FESTS: ARROW VIDEO FRIGHTFEST

By Joseph Perry

Arrow Video FrightFest celebrated its 20th year at London's Cineworld Leicester Square and The Prince Charles Cinema August 22–26. The festival screened a record-breaking 78 films from 14 countries and six continents, hosting 20 world, 20 international/European, and 28 U.K. premieres, including the following offerings.

Writer/director Abigail Blackmore puts a fresh spin on the portmanteau film with the British horror comedy **Tales from the Lodge**, wherein five friends gather at a remote lakeside cabin to mourn the passing of a peer who committed suicide. The framing story is of more importance than the vignettes, which bucks tradition but works well enough here. The episodes run from old-fashioned chiller to dark humor and involve zombies, spirit possession, and an urban legend. The ensemble cast—which includes Laura Fraser (who impressed in the alien abduction shocker **Dark Encounter**, also screened at FrightFest), Johnny Vegas, Sophie Thompson, and MacKenzie Crook—does a fine job, remaining engaging even while some of their characters repeatedly bicker with one another; the main leads also receive end-credits nods for directing their own segments. Blackmore balances the horror and humor splendidly. **Tales** takes a controversial turn in the third act that will definitely leave some viewers offended.

Another film with a questionable choice in its big reveal is the Canadian effort **Halloween Party** from writer/director Jay (**There Are Monsters**) Dahl. The film takes two well-worn horror staples—deadly internet memes and seeing your worst fears realized—and adds a clever sleuthing angle. University student Grace (Amy Groening) is the first to be exposed to the curse and recruits computer whiz Spencer (T. Thomason) to aid her in figuring out how to stop the menace. Naturally, most fellow students don't believe the pair, leading to deadly situations. Starting off as a horror comedy before heading into flat-out scare fare, **Halloween Party** is an amusing, suspenseful valentine to teen detective stories and 1980s teen horror films, with many characters meeting untimely demises. It's fun to follow Grace and Spencer—Groening and Thomason have superb onscreen chemistry—as they uncover the mystery.

The Canadian chiller **Witches in the Woods** employs the familiar trope of a group of young people getting stranded in the middle

of nowhere, only to be subjected to various types of horrors, and adds a few social critique elements. In this case, seven University of Massachusetts students, including two couples and the third person in a love triangle, find themselves hopelessly lost during bitter winter in an area known for past witch trials. The film starts off in cliché-ridden territory as the characters are introduced, complete with a red-herring meeting at a gas station, but writer Christopher (**Eloise**) Borrelli adds some timely intrigue as student Alison (Sasha Clements) is along for the trip with two soccer players, hotheaded Derek (Craig Arnold) and seemingly nicer guy Philip (Corbin Bleu), whose teammates assaulted her. Serious student and justice seeker Jill (Hannah Kasulka) is in a relationship with Derek but has started secretly seeing Philip. Two brothers and a new girl are also along for what everyone expected to be a snowboarding weekend, adding to both the potential body count and drama. Director Jordan Barker, who previously helmed the supernatural outing **The Marsh** (2006) and the cult shocker **Torment** (2013), shows considerable skill at crafting an eldritch atmosphere and building suspense. Though the first act overloads the dramatic set-up and the film contains a few hoary chestnuts, once the characters are stranded in their car in below-freezing temperatures as tempers flare and murders occur, **Witches in the Woods** proves itself to be a taut nail-biter.

**Spiral** also hails from Canada. Director Kurtis David Harder's 1995-set horror outing sees inter-racial same-sex couple Malik (Jeffrey Bowyer-Chapman) and Aaron (Ari Cohen) move with the latter's teenage daughter Kayla (Jennifer LaPorte) from a big city to a smaller town. Malik—alone at home writing a book—suspects that their new neighbors' friendly attitude is merely a facade, especially after he witnesses what he thinks is a diabolical ritual in a nearby home. The film doesn't offer many new angles on the "Do the neighbors belong to some sort of cult?" theme, but this well-made offering has many strengths, including an intriguing take on societal intolerance and fine performances, especially by Bowyer-Chapman as the justly paranoid Malik. Harder delivers with both the dramatic and suspenseful angles.

Continuing the Canadian theme, **Happy Face** is not a horror movie but a powerful, moving drama using real people, many of them first-time actors. Stan (Robin L'Houmeau) distorts his normal face with bandages so that he can sit in with a support group of facially different folks. He does this because his mother is dying of cancer and will soon have tumors removed from her face, and he can't handle visiting her at the hospital. When the group leader and members learn of his betrayal, they are initially angered but then go along with his offer to help them become more comfortable going out into a world that shuns, stares at, and makes remarks about them. Director Alexandre Franchi changed much of his script, which he co-wrote with Joelle Bourjolly, after spending time with his cast members. Their



performances are intriguing, and Franchi deftly portrays their strength within the confines of the support group and their insecurities when doing things as simple as dining in a restaurant.

Maniacal mobsters and mad science collide in **Volition**, an intelligent blend of time-tripping science fiction and film noir. Adrian Glynn McMorran toplines in a crackercrack performance as James, a man who has had the power to see bits and pieces of the future since childhood and who feels that predestination rather than free will drives his life. When he foresees his own death as part of a jewelry caper, he attempts to change his downbeat, fatalistic perspective. Other motivating factors are a budding romantic relationship with Angela (Magda Apanowicz) and the desire to meet estranged foster father Elliot (Bill Marchant), who may hold answers re Adrian's past. Director Tony Dean Smith, who co-wrote the muscular screenplay with his brother Ryan, mines the film for maximum suspense, brilliantly balancing mystery, thrills, and emotion. His cast is stellar in a puzzler that invests as much in human drama as it does in its multilayered story.

Sharing with **Volition** the theme of do-over attempts in life and video-game-like resets after death is the animated **To Your Last Death**. Genre-film stalwart Ray Wise voices wealthy arms manufacturer Cyrus DeKalb. DeKalb hates his adult children and invites them to his office, where he kills all but one, eco-activist daughter Miriam (voiced by Dani Lennon). An otherworldly entity named The Gamesmaster (Morena Baccarin, star of the first two **Deadpool** films) offers Miriam the chance to save her siblings, but naturally there are ulterior motives undisclosed at first. The gore is off the charts, akin to the **Saw** or **Hostel** series and other torture films. The animation ranges in quality; the movement in some action sequences is anything but smooth. Overall, though, the film is well done, and the voice talent—which includes William Shatner as narrator The Overseer—is highly impressive. ♀

# REELING BACK

## MONDO MINEO

### Hollywood's Lonely Boy

By Nancy Naglin

DINO (1957) B&W ♀♀♀

D: Thomas Carr. Sal Mineo, Brian Keith, Richard Bakalyan, Susan Kohner, Joe De Santis, Pat DeSimone. 94 mins. (YouTube)

THE YOUNG DON'T CRY (1957) B&W ♀♀♀

♀♀♀

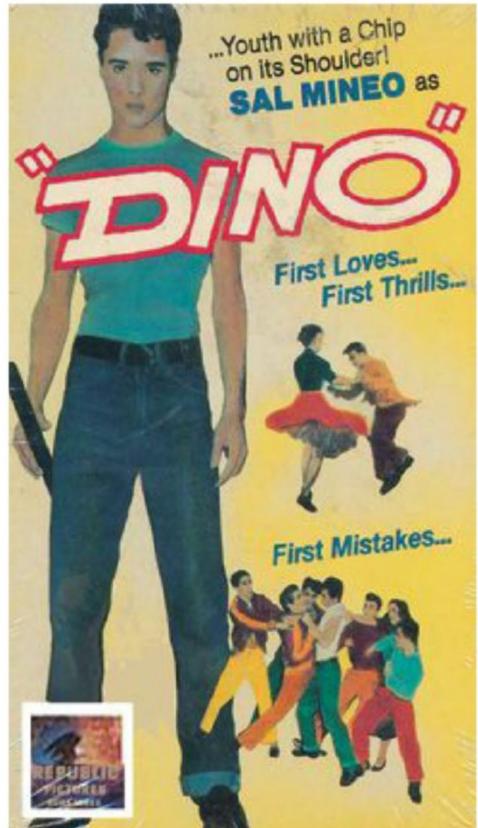
D: Alfred L. Werker. Sal Mineo, James Whitmore, J. Carroll Naish, Gene Lyons, Paul Carr, Leigh Whipper, Thomas A. Carlin, Dolores Rosedale. 89 mins. (YouTube)

"I'm just a soul whose intentions are good. Please don't let me be misunderstood," sang The Animals. And those lyrics are the anthem of Sal Mineo (1939-1976), Hollywood's '50s go-to Lonely Boy, who crafted, then came to inhabit and, ultimately, be plagued by the lost, lonely, explosive and sexually ambiguous "Plato" trailing after and, possibly, hopelessly in love with James Dean's Jim Stark in **Rebel Without a Cause** (1955). Magnificent as the troubled teen abandoned by his parents, Mineo in 1956 went on to costar in a slum-set version of the part opposite gang leader John Cassavetes (at 27, a little too old for the role) and James Whitmore, a do-gooder who saves the con-

flicted Mineo from committing a crime, in the highly recommended **Crime in the Streets**. Like juvenile troublemaker Mark Wahlberg, Mineo had grown up in a rough neighborhood and by the age of eight was in a Bronx gang (!). His concerned mother sent him for dancing lessons, he played the child prince on Broadway in **The King and I** with Yul Brynner (who took him under his wing, offering life and acting advice), and by '57, when Mineo starred in two of his most memorable "lost boy" films, he'd fused a vulnerable acting style with the immediacy and intimacy of personal experience.

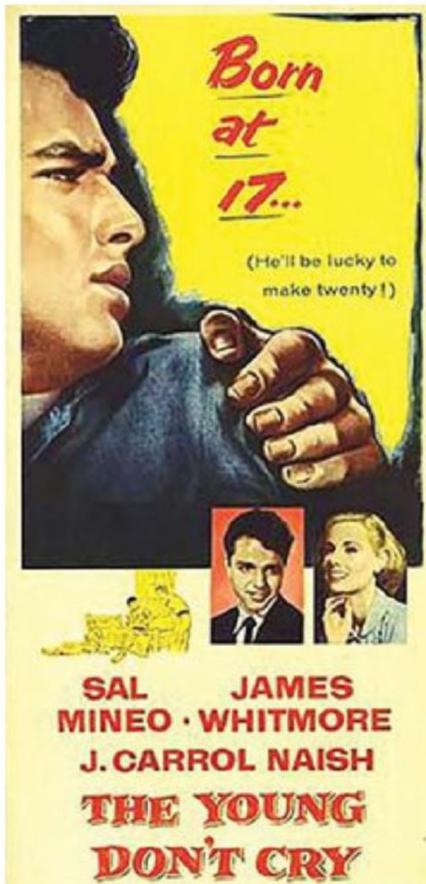
In **Dino**, a taut Reginald Rose teleplay remake, Dino Minetta (Mineo), fresh out of the reformatory, having participated in a murder when he was 13, comes home to find a note that his parents can't be there to greet him; they have to work. Nobody is there for Dino, except a court-ordered shrink, Larry Sheridan (Keith), who must try to find a way to reach a friendless and combative kid, who, with a past, is treated like a pariah. While Dino's admiring younger brother Tony (DeSimone) wants Dino to lead his gang in a robbery and Dad (De Santis) is abusive, naïve, recessive, poetry-writing girlfriend possibility Shirley (Kohner) pops up to soften Dino, **Marty**-style. This is a tough movie, unsparing in its truths and cynicism. Mineo plays both troubled and sensitive and is outstanding in two scenes: the inevitable fight with his father and a wrenching breakthrough, laying it bare in the "skull" doctor's office, yelping: "How come nobody ever kissed me?"

But Mineo's must-see, signature lonely boy role, well worth repeat viewings, is the incomparable **The Young Don't Cry** (based on a Richard Jessup novel), a timeless coming-of-age story embedded in a morally provocative examination of values, ambition, power and race. Summer vacation is coming to the Georgia orphanage, and Les Henderson (Mineo) is looking forward to escape, tooling around in his homemade sailboat. Up the road, a chain gang is laboring away with Rudy Kris (Whitmore again), an aggrieved con proclaiming he'd been misunderstood in a barroom brawl, and African-American pal, the more resigned Doosy (Whipper), hounded by sadistic sheriff Plug (Naish), and locked, like the boys, in a dog-eat-dog environment. Les has a kind side, protecting a younger boy from bully Tom Bradley (Carr) and losing precious time with his boat for his efforts. Successful millionaire alumnus, the crass Max Cole (Lyons), visits, and every boy lusts after his car, cash and trophy wife (Rosedale). Cole dishes out his mantra for success nonstop—walk over everybody, look out for number one—and the boys lap up every word. Les is adrift in this world, especially when schemer Jimmy Clancy (Carlin), certain Cole will hire him, lets Les know he's a loser. Les can't leave the convicts alone. Empathetic, enigmatic Rudy escapes (you never can decide if he's a true criminal or not), and, while Doosy gets involved and is chased down by dogs, Rudy lands on Les's boat. This film has it all: action,



heartache, doubt, self-determination and, most powerfully, a young person coming to understand how rotten the world is and how to cope with it. The ending packs a triple punch for Rudy, Les and Plug and will stay with you for a while.

Mineo had a hit record in '57 with "Start Movin' (In My Direction)" and learned to play drums. He moved on to portray the eponymous percussionist in **The Gene Krupa Story** (1959) and Dov Landau in **Exodus** (1960), where the bisexual and later homosexual Mineo met his on-screen, then on- and off-again lover and true best friend Jill Haworth. He auditioned for **Lawrence of Arabia**; he stormed the beaches in **The Longest Day** (1962). By the mid '60s, however, the Mineo magic was over. Having aged out of lonely boy assignments and passed over for leading adult roles, some allege, because of his homosexuality, Mineo headlined in the 1965 cult exploitation shocker **Who Killed Teddy Bear?** and found work in TV. In 1969, he directed and starred in the play **Fortune and Men's Eyes** with Don Johnson as his prison rape victim. Throughout the '60s and into the '70s, he was a presence on **Mission Impossible**, **Hawaii Five-O**, **Columbo**, even **My Three Sons** but never regained the star allure of his early career; he also had money problems. His last film role was the chimpanzee Dr. Milo in **Escape from the Planet of the Apes** (1971). In 1976, Mineo, the son of coffin makers, was stabbed through the heart in a robbery gone wrong in the alley behind his apartment off Sunset Strip. His character Les could have written his obituary. Ironically, his career was beginning to turn around. ♀



# HEARD BUT NOT SEEN ADVENTURES IN VOICE-ACTING! ARE BOB & MARTY TALKING TO ME? By Bill Timoney

I grew up a good boy. I did what I was told to do—and what not to do. But I spent my childhood obsessed with cinema. And with my NJ hometown of River Edge located between Paramus and Hackensack—two towns packed with movie theaters—the siren's call to sneak off to the movies was hard to resist. But I was a good boy.

One of the first flicks I saw without my parents—but with their approval—was **Cromwell** (Richard Harris). My brother Mike and I took the 11A bus down Kinderkamack Road to the Fox Theater on Hackensack's Main Street. The Fox was across the street from the Oritani Theater, which booked less prestigious titles (I would later see many AIP-distributed Amicus horror flicks there).

On this day, the Oritani was showing **Hornet's Nest**, a WWII actioner with Rock Hudson and Sylva Koscina. I had seen the delectable Ms. Koscina in **Deadlier Than the Male** on TV, so seeing her on the big screen was tempting. But we had promised our parents we would see **Cromwell**, so see **Cromwell** we did (it was over our heads, but brother Mike and I enjoyed the bloody battles).

Another time, me and the guys were playing ball in the park one Saturday afternoon when someone suggested we catch the 11A to see the scandalous **Mark of the Devil** at the Oritani. My parents had already seen the TV commercial for this “rated V for violence” flick, so I was forbidden to see it. So were the other guys, but they went anyway. I didn't. I was the good boy. Though I was envious when one of the guys showed up at school Monday morning with his lunch packed in the movie's promotional “vomit bag” (unused).

Which brings me to my acting career.

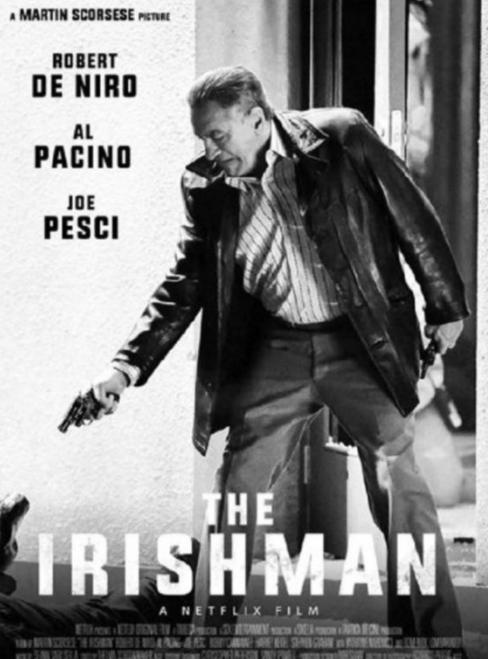
Doing what you're told might be a good way to avoid getting into trouble with your parents, but it's not a good approach to the craft of acting. I think of Martin Scorsese's **Taxi Driver**, which I saw my senior year of high school and which taught me the difference between a film and a movie (the way I cherish my back issues of *American Film Magazine* just as much as my *Monster Times*).

Paul Schrader's **Taxi Driver** script contained a scene described with the single line “Travis admires himself in the mirror.” That's it. Schrader and Scorsese encouraged star Robert De Niro to express exactly what “admires himself” meant. Having done his research (including listening to recordings made by the guy who shot Gov. George Wallace), De Niro improvised that now classic “you talkin' to me” monologue. He didn't wait to be told what to do with the scene; it was his job to prepare to improvise.

De Niro's **Taxi** prep popped into my mind when Scorsese cast me last year in his new film **The Irishman**. Scorsese and De Niro have been demigods to me for over 40 years. But the only time I came close to working with either was when I did group looping for some episodes of the Scorsese-produced TV series **Boardwalk Empire**. In one ep, our group sang the Irish song “Carrickfergus” (“I'm drunk again, and I'm seldom sober”). I warbled particularly drunkenly, wondering if Scorsese might hear my voice and maybe think “who is that guy?”

I received my **Irishman** script a week before filming. I'd play the prosecutor at the trial of Frank Sheeran [De Niro]. The script contained Frank's courtroom outburst from the witness stand...and nothing else. Not only did my prosecutor have no scripted lines, the character wasn't even listed in the script!

When I arrived on set, the courtroom was packed with judge, jury, spectators, etc. There seemed to be about a hundred crew members. The 1st AD asked me, “Has Marty told you what he wants you to say?” I replied, “No.” He hurriedly brought the film's researcher over, who explained “This was a real trial....” But after two minutes, she said to the 1st AD, “Bill knows more about this trial than I do.”



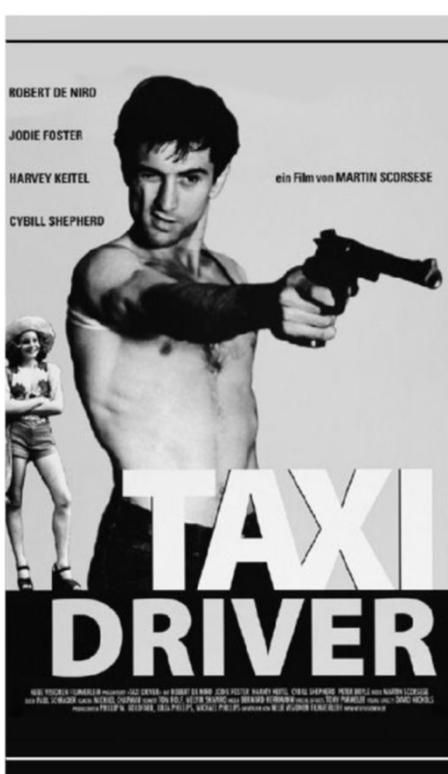
Recalling De Niro's preparation work on **Taxi Driver**, I had spent the week researching all I could about the trial. Besides, my looping work often required lots of preparation (try ad-libbing dialogue for the Puritans in **The Crucible** or Mel Gibson's fellow revolutionaries in **The Patriot** without research). I met the director when a blur quickly went by me, saying “hicallmeMarty.” Suddenly, De Niro was sitting in the witness box. Scorsese called “Action,” and everyone waited for me to talk.

“Mr. Sheeran, you, your wife and your four daughters currently reside at...” I used the real street address. The real town. The real creek behind the house. De Niro answered all my questions, getting more agitated the more harshly I questioned him. Then I said the word I knew would trigger his outburst, and outburst he did. “Cut,” I heard. “Marty” came up to me and said, “Yeah. Like that.”

For the second take, I changed all my questions. Surprised and delighted, De Niro hugged me and said, “Call me Bob. I'm so glad they hired a real lawyer for this.” I ad-libbed my questions for three-and-a-half hours, never repeating myself. When we wrapped and I said goodbye to Bob, he still wouldn't believe I wasn't a lawyer.

“Marty” said, “Where do I know you from?” Rather than list my resume, I said, “I did some group ADR on **Boardwalk Empire**.” He grinned and said, “I thought I recognized your voice!”

**The Irishman** is now on Netflix. Around the three-hour mark, De Niro is finally brought into court. There's one shot of me asking a question—viewer right—with my left arm extended along the bottom of the frame. I ask my question—only one—then Marty cuts to Bob answering me. It's a very quick shot, so if ya wanna see me...prepare yourself. ♀



## David Annandale's SCI-FI FILE

### THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON (1990)

88

D: D.J. Webster. Robert Sampson, Will Bledsoe, Joe Turkel, Camilla More, John Diehl, Wendy MacDonald. 87 mins. (MVD Visual) 6/19

In 2022, a repair ship, whose purpose is the maintenance of satellites armed with nuclear missiles, suddenly loses power and begins drifting towards a crater on the dark side of the moon. At the same time, a space shuttle that supposedly crashed into the Bermuda Triangle 30 years earlier appears out of nowhere. It docks with the ship and the crew goes aboard, desperate for power resources that will restore the oxygen supply and get the engines going again. Aboard the shuttle, they find a body and make the mistake of bringing it back. Soon, a supernatural force stalks the ship, possessing one crewmember after another. Scripted by future *The Conjuring* scribes Carey and Chad Hayes, *The Dark Side of the Moon*'s blend of SF and supernatural horror anticipates *Event Horizon* by the best part of a decade, though the result is rather more humble. The body-hopping paranoia of *The Thing* is grafted onto the aesthetics of *Alien* (and the look is so close we even have a similar novelty bird toy on the mess table) on a very modest budget. The FX are impressive if familiar — the love of *Alien* informs many of our exterior views of the ship. The plot itself makes very little sense (repair ships with nuclear launch codes?), and the Bermuda Triangle aspect is as silly as the techno-babble. One is also left baffled as to why Lesli (the equivalent of *Alien*'s "Mother") is given a human avatar, in the form of the leather-clad More forever immobile in a chair. Vets Sampson and Turkel do their best, investing conviction in figures who are not so much characters as collections of recycled tropes. There is, though, some interest in seeing the early work of writers who went on to much greater success. The production values are good, too, and if you have an itch for an '80s B-movie Greatest Hits package, this might scratch it. Extras include multiple interviews, a commentary track with executive producers Paul White and Stephen Biro, a promotional booklet, vintage audio track, trailers and a photo gallery.

### IN THE AFTERMATH (1988) 88 1/2

D: Carl Colpaert. Tony Markes, Filiz Tully, Rainbow Dolan, Kenneth McCabe, Kurtiss J. Tews. 85 mins. (Arrow Video) 9/19

Two soldiers (Markes and McCabe) wearing gas-masks wander a post-apocalyptic setting



searching for oxygen. They run afoul of the desperate Tews, who kills McCabe and leaves Markes for dead. Fortunately, Markes' dire straits are observed by an apprentice angel (Dolan) in the form of a young girl clutching a huge egg. Her intervention leads to his being rescued by Tully and brought to the temporary refuge of a hospital. As a relationship blooms between Markes and Tully, the angel seeks to fulfill her destiny through their salvation. *In the Aftermath* is a strange hybrid, recalling such Frankensteinian creations as the American transformation of the Soviet *Planeta Bur* (1962) into *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* (1965). The live-action scenes are intercut with animated sequences lifted from *Angel's Egg*, a 1985 anime directed by Mamoru (*Ghost in the Shell*) Oshii. The blend works better than it has any right to, in that it is surprising that it works at all, and the transitions from one form to the other are quite clever. The post-apocalyptic wasteland is the familiar factory-and-sand landscape endemic to low-budget '80s films, and the live-action sequences come across like an Albert Pyun flick in a meditative mode. The animation is gorgeous, highly reminiscent of French SF comics of the era (the city the young girl angel moves through looks like a night-shrouded Paris). The narrative is necessarily oblique to fit the two parts together, and though the result is fascinating, it is a film that one analyzes, watching as if at a distance. Its main effect is to make one wish one were seeing the unadulterated *Angel's Egg*, which looks amazing. A definite curiosity, though, and worth seeing for that reason. The extras are interviews with producer Tom Dugan and star Tony Markes, a discussion of *Angel's Egg* by Andrew Omond, and a still and poster gallery. 88

## The Phantom's DOOMSDAY THEATER

### WARNER ARCHIVE

(\$21.95 Blu-ray) 11/19

### THE WORLD, THE FLESH AND THE DEVIL (1959) B&W 88

D: Ranald MacDougall. Harry Belafonte, Inger Stevens, Mel Ferrer. 95 mins.

Doubtless due to the mega-popularity of his 1950s calypso records, which even hardcore rock'n'roll kids responded to, we thought of Harry Belafonte as a singer first, actor second. Turns out it was the other way around, with Belafonte initially breaking in as a stage thespian before hitting his stride as a singer. 1959 emerged as a major year for Belafonte the actor and musician both. While his platters continued to climb the charts, HB enjoyed what were arguably his two greatest movie roles, as mob-indebted musician Johnny Ingram in Robert Wise's bleak, blistering heist film/racial parable *Odds Against Tomorrow* (VS #100), produced by Belafonte's own HarBel company, and as Ralph Burton, the last everyman on Earth in MacDougall's previously elusive doomsday drama *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*, now out in a crisp Blu-ray via Warner Archive. Harry carries the latter film's first act all by his lonesome as a miner who survives atomic annihilation and wanders a people-depleted but otherwise intact Manhattan, conducting conversations with a pair of mannequins he requisitions (predating by decades Tom Hanks' inanimate pal Wilson the volleyball in *Castaway*) to share his posh new apartment (where he gets to sing and play guitar a bit to boot). Though agonizingly lonely at times, African-American Ralph also experiences his first taste of true freedom — life in an America suddenly shorn of racism. That changes with the appearance of fellow survivor Sarah Crandall (Stevens), a blonde woman who provides desperately needed company but also inadvertently revives racial tensions. Pointedly, it's Ralph who puts himself back "in his place," rejecting Sarah's attempts to escalate their intimacy. The situation grows stickier still when Ralph rescues an unexpected intruder, self-entitled upper-class Manhattanite Benson Thacker (Ferrer), who, upon recovery, wants to fight Ralph for mating rights with Sarah. (Ironically, Ferrer, of Cuban descent, played a light-skinned black man passing for white in 1949's *Lost Boundaries*. He'd go on to become a familiar face for genre hounds with late-career cameos in the likes of *Alligator*, *Eaten Alive!* and *City of the Walking Dead*.) While *World* works fairly well as a racial fable, its most haunting scenes unfold in the early going as Ralph roams the time-frozen streets of an eerily deserted NYC, free at last, if not for long. 88

## TIME WARP

# Nichelle Nichols Looks Back on Race in Space As Told To Ronald Smith

Genre journalist Ronald Smith recently caught up with once and future Lt. Uhura Nichelle Nichols to relive a crucial moment in cultural history, aka The Kiss.

**RONALD SMITH** *Is it true that you got a ton of fan mail when Star Trek was on the air—but they didn't tell you? Why was that? They didn't want you asking for more money?*

**NICHELLE NICHOLS** Thousands of letters would arrive at the studio, but I didn't know about it. For a long time I didn't know. There was something about a black woman getting a lot of fan mail that bothered a few people in the mail room. Others in the cast would talk about all their fan mail, and I was disappointed, but then I was told, "There's a ton of mail for you, haven't you been getting it?" Then I found out.

**RS** *So there was a bit of a toxic environment. You have people sabotaging your mail and you're being limited in what Uhura could do on a show dominated by Kirk and Spock.*

**NN** I was going to leave. I was getting offers.

**RS** *I heard you were going to take the role Gail Fisher played on Mannix.*

**NN** I had a few choices, including doing a play, but something happened. Somebody told me not to leave Star Trek.

**RS** *Gene Roddenberry.*

**NN** No, Gene accepted my resignation. I handed in my resignation, but he told me to think about it and not make it official just yet. Give it the weekend. It was strange that he said it, because Saturday night I had an event scheduled. It was an

NAACP event, and I'm meeting all kinds of people, and there's Dr. Martin Luther King and he's smiling and he's coming over to meet me. He said, "I am your greatest fan. Our whole family stays up to watch your show." I was almost speechless, Dr. King saying this. I said, "Thank you, I enjoyed working on the show, and I will miss it." He looked me and he said, "You cannot. You are a role model. You are a presence on television. You play someone intelligent and beautiful and who has an important position." I had an offer for a stage production. A lot of things. I couldn't leave now.

**RS** *There were plenty of black entertainers already on Broadway and in nightclubs but not on television. Maybe that was it. That's a huge audience every week.*

**NN** Yes, the way Dr. King said it, he made me appreciate more than ever what my role was on Star Trek and how the world, how the universe was seeing me. On Monday morning, I went back to Gene and told him what Dr. King had said, and he tore up the resignation.

**RS** *You did a lot of NASA events. For a long time, pre-Sally Ride, and even after, you were the inspiration for so many women who thought about getting into the space program.*

**NN** That's right, I'm sort of a role model for women in space. For women to be more visible in any phase of it, not just astronauts. Technicians...

**RS** *Communications officers. Any guy could be Kirk, but women got the idea that if Uhura could be in space, they could, too. It seems incredible that the original [Kirk/Uhura] kissing scene was historic at the time, but I know there were intense restrictions back then, especially with the affiliate local TV stations in the South. Was there a question of whether that scene would ever be in the final version of the episode?*

**NN** The director stopped the scene. He came over and said to Bill, very quietly, "You kissed her." Bill says, "That's what it says in the script." He tried to make a little joke about it. He said, "She



*You must remember this: Kirk and Uhura—kisstory in the making.*

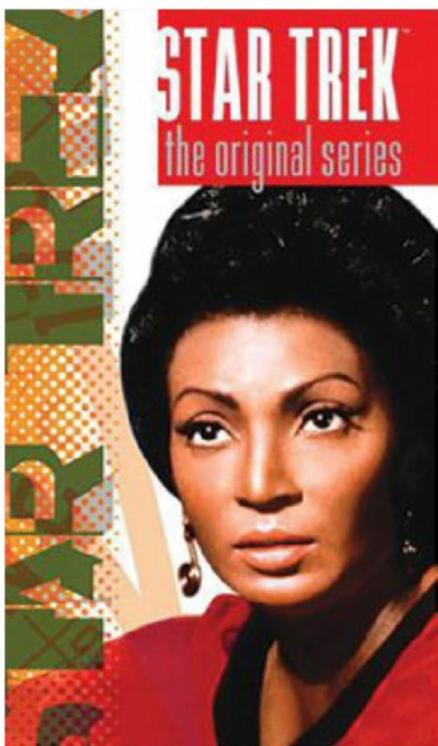
won't let me kiss her if it's not in the script." Then he said to me, "I knew I'd get you one day!" He was trying to relieve the tension. I walked away from it. I said, "When you figure out what the problem is, I'll come back. I'll be in my dressing room." Gene said to shoot a few different versions of it. They wanted one with just an embrace, where there was no kissing at all. Bill did one of those and crossed his eyes, just to mess it up.

**RS** *Was everybody laughing? Angry?*

**NN** It was silence. Some of them seemed to have like, nervous laughter, but they were suppressing it. Finally, people from NBC and Gene looked at the dailies and said, "Go with the kiss."

**RS** *The first interracial kiss. On the Shatner TV Roast, you said you wanted to kiss him again.*

**NN** I said the kiss was history. Then I said, "Let's make more history—and kiss my black ass!"



## They Came From The Basement!

By John Seal

SHARKS' TREASURE (1975)  1/2

D: Cornel Wilde. Cornel Wilde, Yaphet Kotto, John Neilson, David Canary, Cliff Osmond, David Gilliam. 95 mins. (n.i.d.)

Born in Hungary, eight-year-old Kornél Lajos Weisz emigrated to the United States in 1920 and promptly became Cornel Wilde. Originally training to be a doctor, Wilde ended his studies in the early 1930s and began acting on the stage, where his dark good looks attracted the attention of Hollywood. Initially signed by Warner Brothers in 1940, Wilde would later do time at Fox and Columbia, after which he founded his own production company in the 1950s. Arguably, Wilde is best remembered today for the films he produced independently (including 1965's *The Naked Prey* and 1967's *Beach Red*), but by the 1970s the aging polymath's film career was slowly winding down.

Before retiring, however, Wilde had one last cinematic arrow to draw from his quiver: **Sharks' Treasure**, an old-fashioned action-adventure flick set in the sun-dappled Caribbean. Likely intended to cash in on the success of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1974), **Sharks' Treasure** has largely been forgotten—it certainly isn't as well known as **The Naked Prey**—but is definitely worth a look, Roger Ebert's damning opinion notwithstanding.

In addition to producing and directing **Sharks' Treasure**, Wilde also wrote the screenplay, penned the film's awful theme song (entitled "Money Money," it includes the couplet "how you gonna fill your tank/less you got it in the bank?"), and headlines as grizzled seafarer Jim Carnahan. Owner and operator of the good ship *Moby I*, Jim meets Ron Walker (**The Folks at Red Wolf Inn**'s Neilson), an enthusiastic youngster who shows him a coin he claims to have found off the coast of Honduras. Intrigued, Jim secures a loan to finance an expedition and promptly sets sail aboard the *Moby I* for points south.

Along for the adventure—and, of course, a cut of the proceeds—are former Navy diver Ben Flynn (Kotto, good as always) and pal Larry (Canary), a fellow swabbie suffering from Vietnam-induced PTSD (he stammers). Neither of them get along very well with the abrasive and authoritarian skipper, however, who—in common with the real-life Wilde—is also a health fanatic who loves doing one-armed push-ups almost as much as he hates cigarettes and alcohol.



## Tim Ferrante's THE TRUTH FROM THE BOOTH

You have to admire the occasional **Jeopardy!** player who nails all of the correct responses in a single category. Once or twice a year there's a category where I'm very knowledgeable and can knock off all five of the writers' concoctions without a second thought. I'm still waiting for the one category where I know I'd excel: *Film Projection Esoterica*. Yes, I can hear you snickering. But ya never know. In the meantime, I made up my own **Jeopardy!** category for *Film Projection Esoterica*. You read it here first. And I predict—with utmost confidence—that you'll have read it here last, as well.

*Film Projection Esoterica* for \$200: "A projector creates a moving picture by rapidly flashing these at a rate of 24 per second."

The correct response: "What are frames?"

For \$400: "A torn piece of film can be mended using a technique known as this."

The correct response: "What is splicing?"

For \$600: "It's the image anomaly that occurs when a projector's shutter closes either too late or too early."

The correct response: "What is travel ghost?"

For \$800: "Academy, Universal and Society are three types of this."

The correct response: "What is film leader?"

For \$1000: "It's the term used for the distance from the projector's lens to the surface of the screen."

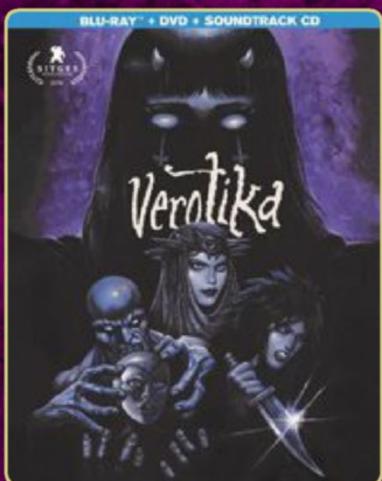
The correct response: "What is the Throw Distance?"

Now wasn't that fun? A mass TV audience would just love, love, love it!

Seriously though, the above weirdness was inspired by a recent conversation with a casino bartender who I see regularly. She can't be more than 22 or 23 years old. I'd mentioned having been a theatre projectionist and her face sort of blanked out into a *what?* expression. Then it struck me. The phase-out of theatrical film projection was already underway when she was about 10 years old. Her movie reality? They're something you stream on a tablet. So I quickly added, "You know, back in the day when there was film. It had the holes in it. On a reel." That she understood. Film...Boomer...the stuff talked about on PBS documentaries and by gray-haired pensioners who patronize her bar. *I'll take Film Projection Esoterica for \$2000, Alex.* I immediately dropped the subject and went back to my libation and playing Cleopatra Keno on the bartop touchscreen.

Since when, of all things, are sobering moments allowed at a bar?! 

# THE NEWEST & GNARLIEST HORROR, CULT, & NOIR



## VEROTIKA

Glenn Danzig's creepy, surreal & bloody trilogy of erotic horror stories.

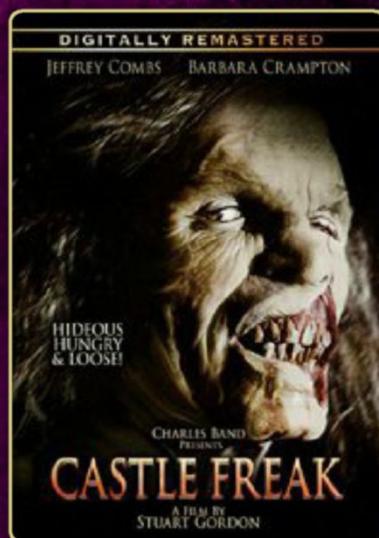
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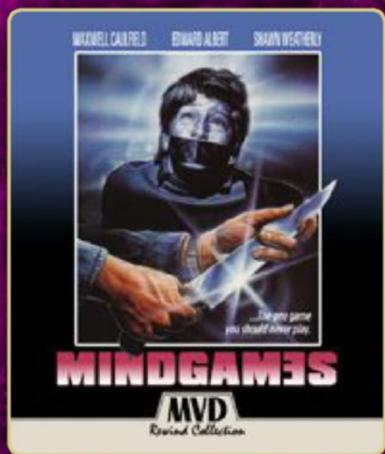
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# DANGER GOD GARY KENT!

**As Told To**  
**Terry & Tiffany DuFoe**

When Walla Walla, Washington native Gary Kent headed to Hollywood in the 1950s, he had little inkling he'd carve out an enduring multi-hyphenate career as a character actor, stunt star, special effects expert and general jack of all cinematic trades. Along the way he's worked with a wide array of auteurs, from Al Adamson to Brian De Palma, directed films of his own, including the highly regarded **The Pyramid**, and authored the book **Shadows & Light: Journeys with Outlaws in Revolutionary Hollywood**. Said to be the model for Brad Pitt's character in Quentin Tarantino's **Once Upon a Time...In Hollywood** and subject of the documentary **Danger God**, Gary continues to act in films like **Frame Switch** and **Sex Terrorists on Wheels**. Our dynamic dad/daughter duo, Terry & Tiffany DuFoe, caught up with Gary for the following decades-spanning chat.

**TERRY DUFUE** How did you end up getting involved in the motion picture industry? You actually studied journalism in school, right?

**GARY KENT** That's right. I was a publicity director for The Blue Angels, the Navy flight team. The Navy at that time was trying to get the sailors and the local people more involved with each other, so they started a drama program. For some reason, they wanted me to sort of coordinate that. I think I was 18 or 19 years old. I ended up putting together all these shows that involved Navy and civilian people. I fell in love with the whole idea of show business, and it changed me. Then I got involved with a professional theater group in Houston, Texas, and when the theater broke up, all the other people went to New York. But I had just seen Marlon Brando in **On the Waterfront** and I thought, "Man, if I could just do anything close to that, I'd die happy!" So I took a Greyhound to Hollywood and that was it. I was watching them shoot on Gower Street a Frank Sinatra movie and they said, "Okay, stuntmen go to your cars!" All these guys who looked like gladiators went to these cars and then on "action" they just started crashing them and smashing them! I thought, "That's what I want to do!"

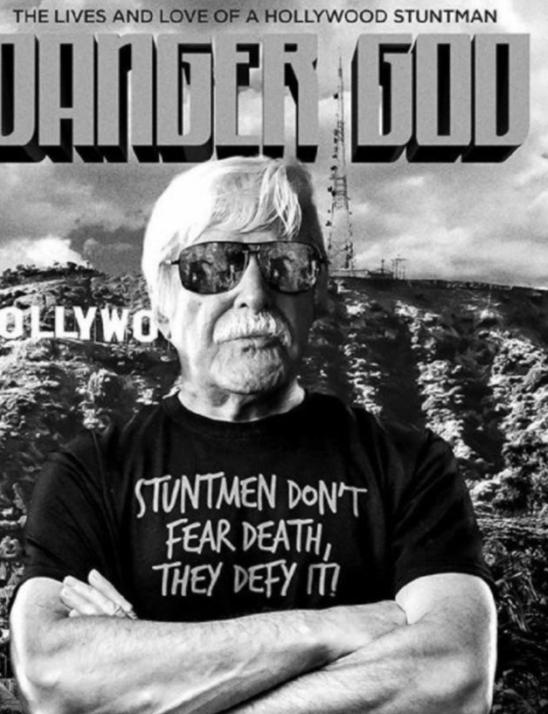
Then when the drive-ins came along, they opened up to all these independent filmmakers. Guys like Al Adamson and Richard Rush and all those great early filmmakers. They started getting a chance to do these ridiculous, crazy, wonderful films that the studios wouldn't touch at that time.

**TD** The thing about those days is that it might have been a little easier to get in. You could even lie. I understand you did lie about a few things in order to land jobs, such as saying you could ride a horse in a certain way?

**GK** Luckily, I lied my way into a Jack Nicholson movie [**The Shooting**] going on up in Utah. That's how I got started. I said I was a stuntman. I said I could handle horses, which I could, and up we went. I did a bunch of horse falls. Then **Daniel Boone** came up. That TV company hired me up there as one of their stunt guys. They really knew the ropes, so by the time I got back to L.A. after those two months in Utah, I was almost a seasoned stuntman. When I got back, the production manager Paul Lewis was doing another film in L.A. where they needed a stunt guy. He knew I had handled the horses, so I must be okay. So he hired me to work this biker film, which was also doubling Jack Nicholson. I had ridden motorcycles but not a lot. I was never a real biker. I just went out and rented a bike and started going up and down Mulholland Drive and Laurel Canyon and getting out by Indio and taking some sand spills until I really got familiar with the machine. Then I met a fellow named Chuck Bail, who had helped found the Stuntmen's Association. He and I were going to do a big chariot race and the movie didn't go but we had become friends in the meantime. I hired Chuck on that same biker film to do a fight with me. Chuck really knew what he was doing. He lived way out in Sun Valley and he had seven acres. He had several horses. He had a high fall tower. He had a boxing ring. We could go out there on weekends and practice fights and high falls. You'd get hired by someone who would teach you if you didn't know. If they knew you were pretty handy, one of the other stunt guys would teach you how to do a new gag. That's kind of the way that worked, just by working with the guys and moving up all the time. Luckily, I got a chance to coordinate a lot of stunts and think them out. I loved that part of it.

**TD** What was it like working with Ray Dennis Steckler? One of your first films was **The Thrill Killers**.

**GK** I loved Ray Steckler. If he had ten cents he was going to make a movie with it! He would just charm everyone into working for him. For instance, **Thrill Killers** was shot by Joe Mascalci, who was a great director of photography. He wrote the cinematographer's handbook [**The Five C's of Cinematography**] that most camera people carry around in their back pockets to this day. Ray would just get all these people. [Cinematographers] Vilmos Zsigmond and Laszlo Kovacs.



Danger God Gary Kent: Ready for action.

**TD** I heard you talking in another interview about how director Al Adamson never had a permit. I would assume Ray Dennis Steckler didn't have one either.

**GK** Never! He just grabbed a camera and said, "Come on!" The thing everyone used then, if the police came up while you're out on the sidewalk shooting, you were *always* students from UCLA. That was the standard thing.

**TD** Your character in **The Thrill Killers**—do you wanna talk about who you played and how it was doing that?

**GK** Man, I didn't know where to go with it. For instance, my name was Gary and Ray cast me as Gary, as myself, which he did almost with everyone. It was sort of spontaneous and there wasn't really a script. He would just say, "Okay, come in the room and terrorize each other." We would kind of ad-lib everything, so not only were you dealing with trying to be authentic as a seriously dangerous person but you were trying to think up your own lines as you did it. Ray would just stand around behind the camera and yell "cut" every now and then.

**TD** How did you feel about making the transition to an actor?

**GK** Al Adamson had given me my first lead, so I would go work for Al, even though he was doing essentially not a great quality film. But Richard Rush and Brian De Palma, I loved working for those guys. Peter Bogdanovich, too. It was just better filmmaking. You really felt like you were in the biz when you were on those films.

**“So when you see that movie and you see Tom running across the plaza and you see all this stuff flying through the air, it's dog poop.”**

**Gary Kent on  
The Born Losers**

*TD My favorite kind of an actor is a character actor, but sometimes actors get offended when you say that. How would you describe yourself?*

*GK Character actor—I'll take that any day. I just love film. Once I got out to L.A. and I saw how long the lines were for actors trying out for things, I thought, “Man, I don't want to stand in line forever and get my picture thrown in the trashcan every other week.” So I started doing anything I could do on a film. I just fell in love with the whole process of how films were made back then. I did a lot of special effects. I did a lot of stunt work, which I also loved doing. Production managing. Anything I could do to help get a film made I was just very, very happy to do. But acting-wise, character acting. That's it and I love it.*

*TD We didn't realize until we were looking down your long list of credits that you even did special effects on one of our favorite films, *The Born Losers*. I assume you had some moments with Tom Laughlin on the set.*

*GK I never had a conflict with Tom Laughlin. There were some that did, but he had a lot of energy and he had a good rep as kind of a martial-arts guy going into it. He knew what he wanted to do and he would just walk on the set and say, “Let's do it!” He got his films made that way, just out of sheer bluster. Working with Tom was an adventure. I was supposed to do this scene. Tom was going to run across this plaza and they were going to fire at him while he ran across it, this sort of concrete plaza. So I was supposed to plant some bullet hits that would go off as he ran across. I would usually plant ten or twenty of those and I would pack them with Fuller's Earth, which is a soft powder that makes a big puff in the air when it goes off. Anyway, when I got there I found out I had forgotten the Fuller's Earth and I didn't have anything to pack that little electrical squib in. Now the shot was coming up and it was low-budget, of course, so time was of the essence. I could see Tom from a long ways away, coming to get that shot. I thought, “Man, what am I going to do?” So I asked my assistant, “Quick! Get me something to pack these little squibs with.” And he went running around. He came back and said, “There isn't anything. What are we going to do?” I*

looked over in the corner of the plaza and there was a little pile of dog poop. I said, “Get me that poop!” And he said, “No, no, Gary! You can't do that!” I said, “Yes, I can.” So when you see that movie and you see Tom running across the plaza and you see all this stuff flying through the air, it's dog poop.

*TD Did he ever find out?*

*GK No, I don't think so. I hope not!*

*TD That's one of the fun things about special effects, isn't it? You have to kind of figure out how to make something work.*

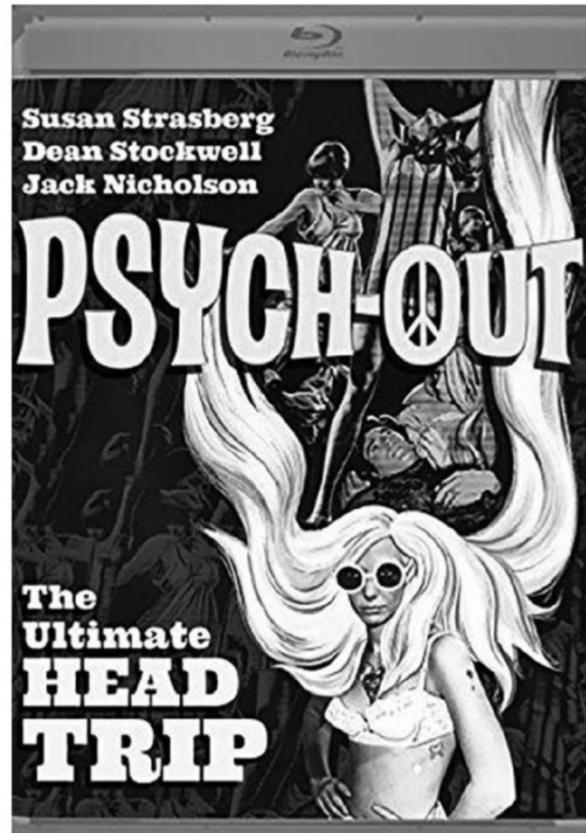
*GK Yeah, that was also one of the great things about independent film and the drive-in movies. You got to be so creative. You got to wear many hats and you hardly ever had a lot of money. So you had to come up with all these things on the fly and make them work. In a way, it was much more creative than the majors where if you're an electrician, that's what you do. If you need something, you call the prop department. There's no such thing as figuring it out yourself.*

*TD We interviewed Sam Arkoff and William Asher and they told me that with the biker films the real Hell's Angels, even though they would be involved in some of the films, they would get pissed off at the way they were portrayed. Did you hear any of that with some of the biker films you were involved with?*

*GK Yes. Actually, there were only two films that the real Angels, Sonny Barger and the boys, worked. One of them was a picture called **Hell's Angels on Wheels** and that was with Jack Nicholson and Adam Roarke. Richard Rush directed it. I directed the stunts on it. It was the first biker film that Sonny Barger actually agreed to do because the bikers thought they were all such crap where the other guys were pretending they were Angels but they really weren't. We worked with them. I worked with Sonny on that movie. It was a blast.*

*TD You worked quite a few times with Jack Nicholson in things like *The Shooting and Ride in the Whirlwind* but also in the quintessential hippie rebellion film *Psych-Out*. What was it like working on that?*

*GK I love **Psych-Out**. It was one of my favorite experiences. First of all, I loved the director Richard Rush. I did a lot of films with Richard—a really, really good director. He directed **The Stuntman** with Peter O'Toole and **Hell's Angels on Wheels**, **Getting Straight**, **Freebie and the Bean**. Nicholson was in it. Bruce Dern was in it. Dean Stockwell. Henry Jaglom. Just a lot of*



really good people. I got to be a bad guy, “Thug #1,” which is usually my mantra. You know, I'm either Thug #1 or Rapist #1. But also I got to coordinate all the stunts. So I had a blast on that film. I just got to do so much. But again, we all felt we were doing an important piece for once. We thought **Psych-Out** was making a statement of some kind about what was going on with the hippies and the revolution and the whole outlaw attitude toward established authority. We all felt kind of that we were part of that in making that film. Of course, we shot in Haight-Ashbury, which was the big hang-out for the hippie movement at that time. The seeds of it anyway.

*TD Did you see any drug use on the set?*

*GK Are you kidding me? Yes, I saw drug use! I'll give you a good example. Jack Nicholson was supposed to pull out a joint somewhere and offer it to someone to smoke it. The prop guy, who was new to everything and didn't know anything about pot at all, went out and said, “What do I do?” Someone told him, “Get some oregano and roll it up in paper and use that.” So he came up to Jack and handed him this joint of oregano. Jack said, “What is that?” And he said, “It's a joint.” Jack said, “No no no...” and he reached in his pocket and pulled out a real one. He said, “This is a joint!” I think almost everybody that I worked with, except for maybe a couple, back in those days in the late 1960s probably was into pot. Crewmembers and some directors, too. Cocaine started coming in a bit later and it made the rounds quickly and then a lot of people, including me, said, “No, this doesn't really work with what we have to do, which is stunts!”*

**"You'd walk by and there would be this incredible waft of marijuana smoke coming out from under the door and you wouldn't see him again until the next morning."**

**Gary Kent on Jack Nicholson**

*TD We've heard some people say he's very easy to work with, while others have said that he is very difficult. What was your experience like?*

*GK* My experience with Jack was great. He was extremely loyal. He took it all very seriously. He would sometimes party but he wasn't a guy that would go out and party with the crew at night. Usually because he had his love, either his wife or his current flame, with him. He would immediately hit the room with them and it would be all over. You'd walk by and there would be this incredible waft of marijuana smoke coming out from under the door and you wouldn't see him again until the next morning. He could, like everyone else, be a little temperamental or have a problem, but I never saw it affect how he acted on the set and he was never mean. He was never a diva that I saw whenever I was around him, and I worked around him a lot.

*TD I have to know about Dean Stockwell. What was he like?*

*GK* Again, just a great guy. All these guys were just great guys. I don't remember Bruce Dern, at the time, doing any drugs. He played it, but I don't remember him doing it. He was more likely to go have a beer or something, but Stockwell was sort of more esoteric. He was into his head a lot, so I suspected that he was maybe even doing some psychedelics now and then. As you know, he was a child actor and he was just so accomplished and so good. However you might look at those films now, they took them very seriously and believed what they were doing. It was just working with this great ensemble of talent.

*TD You directed two films, *Rainy Day Friends* and *The Pyramid*. *The Pyramid* kind of a 1970s adventure trippy kind of romp, right?*

*GK* I thought, "Well, I'm just going to go ahead and take the plunge and make my own movie." I had been caught up, from **Psych-Out** on, in the whole consciousness movement and what was going on with all the drugs. In those days people were taking drugs to try and find a higher consciousness. To try and bond and make it a better world. I said, "Well, okay, I'll do a film." They said,

"If you're going to do it, write a script about something you know." I had been a news reporter when I first got out of the service in Texas. So I thought, well, I'll make my lead character a news reporter and I'll send him out in the world looking for consciousness, that mysterious thing. What did I know? I got real people like Edgar Mitchell, who was the sixth man to walk on the moon. I got him to act in the movie. I got Thelma Moss, who was the head of neuropsychology at UCLA. I got Clyde Baxter, who did all of the lie detector work for the FBI. I got all these great people and put them in my movie, and it's just a sort of hodge-podge that is loosely directed towards a change in a person's way of looking at life and whatever.

*TD You had a little bit of a departure in a film that you did by Ted V. Mikels. You starred in *One Shocking Moment*!*

*GK* He gave me that part at a time when I desperately needed work or I was going to go back to Texas or Washington or something. All of a sudden Ted just gave me that part out of nowhere where I played, as you know, a kind of very straight guy that gets caught up in this degenerate situation, which is my wont in life. Anyway, working with Ted was a blast. He was funny. We were doing a film in Bakersfield called **The Black Klansman** [1966] and we needed Klansmen and he hired a bunch of the local black people to work as extras because he was paying pretty well and they needed jobs. So they played Klansmen. Here were all these people going around in white robes with hoods over their heads that were really black actors. Then a fire started. We had permits and everything, but we blew up the church and some cops came because they heard there was a riot going on or something. They came and here were all these Klansmen. So they ordered them to take off their hoods and when they did, here were all these black actors underneath the hoods!

We had a great old special effects guy on that film named Harry Roman. Everyone called him "Hairbreadth Harry," which is a bad sign when the special effects guy is called Hairbreadth. Or "Three-Fingered Harry" they called him, which is another bad sign for anyone around explosives. Harry was to rig this pick-up that our lead actor is in and he's to drive this pick-up, late at night, along by the Kern River and he's to drive it into this great big rock where he has it rigged to explode, then he's going to dive out of it at the last minute. Everyone said, "Well, Harry's a little bit old to be doing that." And I said, "Harry, better let me do that. I'm a stuntman. I can dive out." He said, "No, no, we don't need to do that. I'm going to rig it from the outside so we don't need a driver. I can just rig the steering wheel so it'll drive straight into the rock." So we said okay and Ted got everything set up. This was the money shot, right? We got all the cameras. The lights



are on and everything...okay, action! There goes the truck and it starts heading towards that rock...and all of a sudden it veered directly left and we heard this great big kerplunk—because it went right into the Kern River! It just disappeared into the black and then Ted thought Harry was still in the truck, so he went running over to the side of the river and he was yelling, "Save Harry! Get Harry out of the truck!" Harry was standing right next to him, so Harry started yelling, "Get him out! Get him out of the truck!" It took a minute for Ted to realize Harry is standing right next to him.

*TD Did you have a lot of problems with the directors or producers not caring about the safety element because they wanted their shot?*

*GK* Yes and I'm glad you mentioned that. That was one of the problems. Many of the directors had no experience with real action at all and they had no idea of the danger involved. So they would just say, "Here I want the car to roll over this guy and then I want him to lose his arm, blah blah blah." And not stop to think for one second "How are we going to do this and how are we going to do it without killing that guy?" People came along and just said, "No, no, this is the way we're going to do it or we are not going to do it." There was an actor many years ago named Eric Fleming, who did a series called **Rawhide**. They took Eric on a film down in South America somewhere and they didn't have any stunt people on it. They went out on this big river in this boat and the boat capsized and three or four people drowned, including Eric Fleming. At that time, everybody just went nuts and from then on they said, "Well, at least we've got to have a stunt coordinator from now on. Someone who knows how to say no to a director."

**“He would always make us stop at a liquor store early in the morning and we'd have to go in and buy him a bottle so he could get through the day.”**

**Gary Kent on Lon Chaney**

*TD I heard you talk about working with Al Adamson and you had to do a scene at Marineland. He didn't have a permit and you just thought you were just going to tear through the crowd, but you had to be really careful because you were shooting with random people walking around, right?*

*GK* Right! That was Al. He was another one of those marvelous characters. When we shot at Marineland, he would say, “Okay, we're going to have this great shot. You're going to run through the audience.” The audience was watching the dolphins and the seals perform below in the big pool. So maybe there was 1500 to 2000 people sitting in this big amphitheater. Al would say, “Chase the girl down through the crowd and so on and so forth and shove people out of the way! But don't shove too hard because we don't have a permit!” I was Al's AD on that film. I played a small part at the beginning of it but I was his assistant in the filming of it.

*TD What about *Dracula vs. Frankenstein*? Are there any stories that stick out in your mind?*

*GK* All I can say is my very favorite cameraman was a guy named Gary Graver. He shot so many low-budget films. He shot nudie-cuties. He shot everything from A to Z but he was the hardest-working guy I knew in Hollywood. He shot almost all of Al Adamson's films. He was really good and a great guy to work with. I remember working on that film with him and we had major problems because Lon Chaney was sick a great deal of the time. He was not only I think fighting diabetes and other things caused by heavy drinking but he was fighting depression and several other things. I remember it would be up to either Gary or myself to pick him up in the morning and drive him to the set. He would always make us stop at a liquor store early in the morning and we'd have to go in and buy him a bottle so he could get through the day. Even though he played that big oaf killer kind of guy, and I don't know if he had many lines at all other than just grunting and snorting or whatever it was, but he took it so seriously. He was such a pro. Al had sort of a group of guys. Lon Chaney would be one. Scott Brady is another. Russ Tamblyn. Kent Taylor. Guys that had done some really good

work and they all loved Al. One of the reasons is because after you have done so many films and you begin to age a bit, you stop getting calls. Then you start losing your benefits. SAG, if you don't make so much a year, you start losing your medical. All of these guys needed work, and Al would always give them enough money and enough of a role where they could make their benefits and make some decent money again. I think they all appreciated him. Other people kind of made fun of Al, but those guys loved him.

*TD I know you got to work around Boris Karloff because you were in *Targets*. Were you a little starstruck?*

*GK* Absolutely! Karloff was such a gentleman. I did a film once with Gregory Peck and I remember Gregory Peck showing up on the set, his script under his arm, stepping across the cable. You know how a set is. Everything is all strewn everywhere, all the light cables and electrical cables. He was walking through all that mess, all by himself, to get to the set where the camera was and greeting every crew member as he walked on the set.

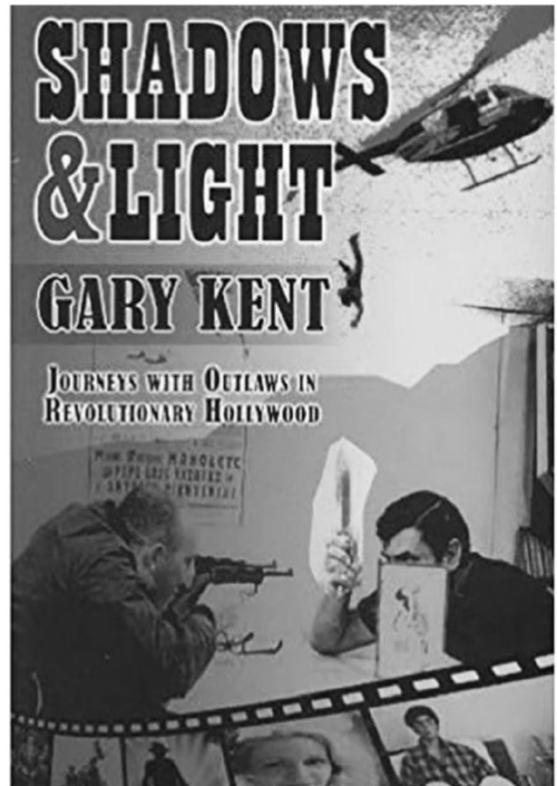
That was the same with Lon Chaney. They just had a degree of professionalism and gentlemanly feeling about them. A lot of the women, too. Boris Karloff used to have lunch with me every day and he would tell me about how he would raise champion roses. He won all these awards for his rose garden. I mean, this is Frankenstein's Monster!

*TD What was it like for you working on a horror movie set versus an action film? You did stunt work on *The Return of Count Yorga*, among other horror films.*

*GK* They are two totally different genres, although the work is kind of the same. The whole attitude on the set is different. On a horror film, everyone thinks of it as a dark art. So even if it's a lousy film, they still think of it as an art. Whereas action for a long time was just thought of as action and it's carrying the picture but it's not particularly an art. It is an art, but they don't think of it that way. But a horror film was its own special little corner that everyone would get excited about while we were shooting it.

*TD You did some stunts on *The Green Hornet*. Did Bruce Lee kick your ass?*

*GK* I'm not going to admit it, but yeah! I loved working with him and also the other series I did was *Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, working with Bobby Vaughn and David McCallum. I loved both of those shows because they both were stunt-oriented, especially Bruce Lee's. Although a lot of the martial-arts stuff was done by Oriental stunt guys schooled by Bruce himself. We did a lot of the driving and falling and leaping around.



A lot of the fight stuff Bruce choreographed and did with his boys.

*TD You did *One Million AC/DC*. Did you have interaction with Ed Wood?*

*GK* I didn't know who he was. I had not seen *Plan 9 from Outer Space* or *Glen or Glenda*. He was always in the editing room. A fellow named Don Jones, one of my buddies, edited it, and Ed Wood Jr. would always be in there with him. He introduced me to him and I thought, “Gee, what a nice guy. You wrote this? Congratulations.” He always had this little Styrofoam cup that was full of vodka. I thought at first it was coffee but it wasn't. He would just go through his day sipping vodka out of that cup. He was a very quiet guy. He had such a flamboyant personality as far as we all know with cross-dressing and making those outlandish movies, but as a person he was just someone you wouldn't think was anything other than just a nice, quiet guy. Maybe an accountant kind of fellow.

*TD Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women had somebody we love—Mamie Van Doren.*

*GK* I just love Mamie. She had this mermaid costume and from the waist down she couldn't move her legs or her feet. So it was my job to carry her every day across these very slippery rocks out into the middle of the Pacific Ocean. That's how I got to know Mamie! Her boyfriend at the time was a baseball player, Bo Belinsky, and he would surf with all his surfing buddies. He would surf up near the shore and watch and just glare at me like “Make sure you don't get loose with those hands, Buddy!”

**“It was my job to carry her every day across these very slippery rocks out into the middle of the Pacific Ocean.”**

**Gary Kent on Mamie Van Doren**

*TD You've done so much but my favorite, I think, next to *Dracula vs. Frankenstein*, is *The Incredible Two-Headed Transplant*.*

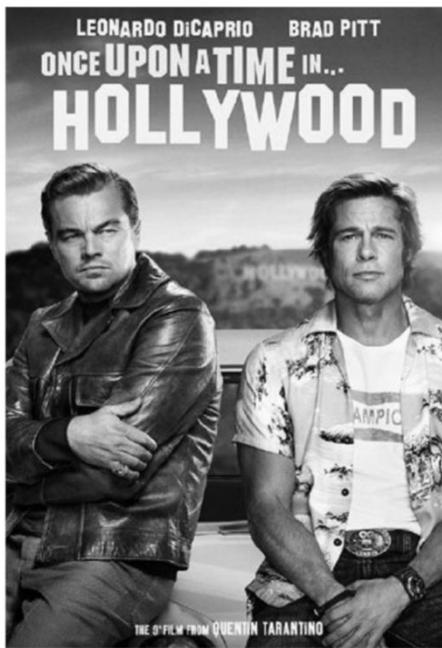
*GK I had a lot of fun doing it. I had to do a fight with John Bloom. John Bloom was almost 8 feet tall, so that was some kind of fight. I had to make it look believable like I could actually last for a minute and a half.*

*TD You also worked on *Phantom of the Paradise*.*

*GK I had gone to Dallas to direct another film that fell apart. I stayed in Dallas and I made a pretty good salary as a unit manager on *Phantom of the Paradise*.*

*TD I bet you hung out in the bar a few nights with Paul Williams. He seems like a fun guy to me.*

*GK Absolutely one of my favorite people, Paul Williams. I remember we had a crew from New York and a crew from L.A. and a crew from Dallas and none of the three got along. We were shooting over Christmas, so everybody was really pissed because they all wanted to be home with their family and we had to shoot anyway. Paul Williams closed everything down and had this gigantic wonderful meal catered for everybody. We just sat around and we had pheasant, duck, and swans made out of ice and champagne and everything. He was just really thoughtful because he knew everybody was down and unhappy. Then he sang for all of us. He was just a great guy. Brian De Palma, who directed it, is not a huggy-feely kind of guy. Brian would sort of talk to his lead actors and the camera person and that was it. He would hardly tell the crew anything. I could never*



get an answer out of him as to what he was going to shoot next. The one that kept everybody's spirits up, the class clown so to speak, was Paul Williams. Every day he showed up on the set and he just had everybody laughing and smiling all day long with the sheer force of his personality.

*TD You're too much of a gentleman to tell me who the real jerks were, right?*

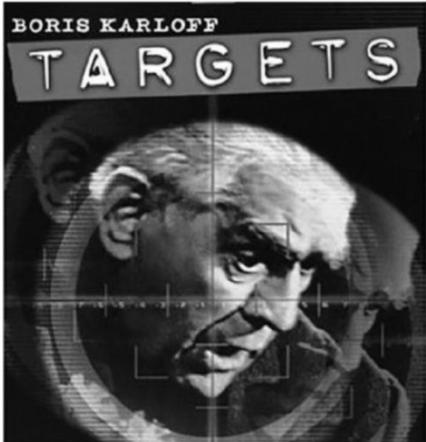
*GK Well, I can give you a couple of hints. There's a huge, macho actor supposedly that is very well known. He's pretty big for wearing black hair and a ponytail and that's all I'm going to say. But he's always pushing his weight around and telling everybody how tough he is and he's a martial-arts expert and he's a cop and he's all of these things and he's a big action star.*

*TD Okay, yes, we know who you mean.*

*GK Well, one day on the set he was telling all the stuntmen that there was nobody that could take him or put him down. On that stunt crew was a little guy named Judo Gene LeBell. Judo Gene was an icon in L.A. for years. His mother helped found The Forum downtown in L.A. His dad was a wrestling coach, and Judo Gene is probably the toughest guy I've ever known. He was 71 years old when "SS" was saying, "Hey, I can take anyone!" And Judo said, "Well here, let me give it a try." So he got up and he put this guy down in like less than a minute! The guy said, "Well, I wasn't ready! Give me another chance!" Judo said, "Okay, let's do it again." And he took him down and rendered him unconscious and the guy pissed his pants on the set. There was this big stain all over the concrete where we were shooting.*

*TD You cannot slow down, Gary, because we just enjoy your work too much!*

*GK Not gonna! I'm going to stay out there!* 



## MONDO TARANTINO

**ONCE UPON A TIME...IN HOLLYWOOD**  
(2019) 

D: Quentin Tarantino. Leonardo DiCaprio, Brad Pitt, Margo Robbie, Margaret Qualley, Emile Hirsch, Timothy Olyphant, Julia Butters, Al Pacino, Kurt Russell, Luke Perry, Bruce Dern, Zoe Bell. 161 mins. (Sony Pictures) 12/19

“The 9<sup>th</sup> Film From Quentin Tarantino” reps a magically immersive ride through 1969 Tinsel Town with your charismatic guides Rick Dalton (DiCaprio), a faded TV western hero (the B&W **Bounty Law**), and his stunt double/best bud Cliff Booth (Pitt), himself reduced to go-fer status. The action roams from TV and movie sets, where a rather dense Rick learns valuable life lessons from eight-year-old actress Trudi Fraser (Butters) while Cliff knuckles up with, and gets the best of, a boastful Bruce Lee (Michael Moh), to the Spahn Ranch, an erstwhile film frontier town where Cliff encounters not only a blind, elderly George Spahn (Dern, an actual former visitor to that now-notorious locale) but a gaggle of ominous Manson Family members, commanded, in Charlie's temporary absence, by a convincingly scary Squeaky Fromme (a terrific Dakota Fanning). In addition to flawless performances by the leads, **Once** offers a field day for Spot the Character King players, featuring cameos by the likes of Clu (**The Tall Man**) Gulager, Martin (**The Karate Kid**) Kove, QT regular Michael (**Reservoir Dogs**) Madsen, James (**The Warriors**) Remar and more, plus excellent supporting work by screen stars Kurt Russell, as stunt coordinator Randy Miller, and Al Pacino, as Rick's ever-optimistic agent Marvin Schwarz. With witty dialogue galore, a note-perfect AM rock radio soundtrack, colorfully authentic production design, and one of the wildest fantasy finales ever committed to celluloid (genuine 35mm film stock, with scattered 16mm and 8mm inserts), **Once** emerges as a wonderful wallow in Hollywood lore, real and imagined. Extras on Sony's Blu-ray + DVD + Digital combo pack include seven additional scenes, from clever commercials for fictional products ranging from Red Apple Cigarettes to Old Chattanooga Beer to an extended version of Rick's guest host stint on **Hullabaloo** (where he further mangles Jim Lowe's irritating '50s novelty hit “The Green Door”) and a lengthy dead-end exchange between Rick and TV director Sam Wanamaker (Nicholas Hammond) that was wisely excised, featurettes covering the film's vintage vehicles and fashions, an interview with cinematographer Bob Richardson, and other worthy sidebars. Withal, **Once Upon a Time...in Hollywood** is a time trip film fans won't want to miss. 

—The Phantom

# The Phantom's NOIR GANG

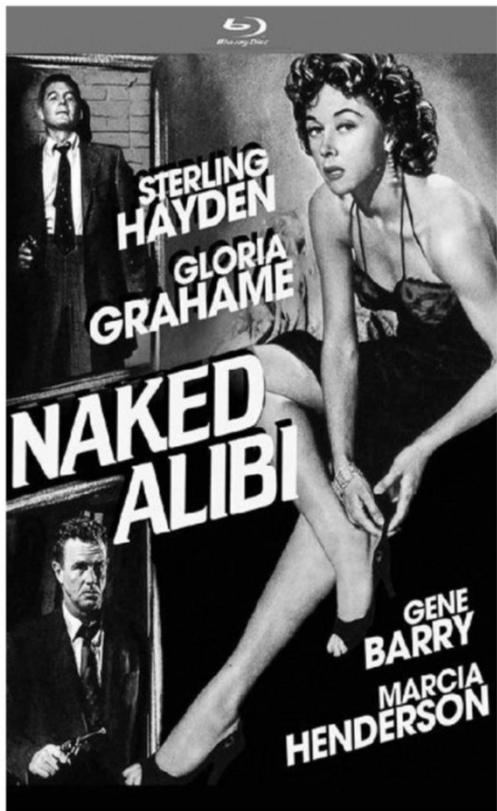
THEFILMDTECTIVETV.COM

THE AMAZING MR. X (1948) B&W

★☆☆1/2

D: Bernard Vorhaus. Turhan Bey, Lynn Bari, Cathy O'Donnell, Richard Carlson, Donald Curtis, Virginia Gregg. 78 mins.

Noted noir cinematographer John Alton—who literally wrote the book on the topic (his seminal *Painting with Light* was published the following year)—has a visual field day here: When it comes to startling shadowplay, **The Amazing Mr. X** (aka **The Spiritualist**) may well out-noir them all, with particularly striking and downright spooky nocturnal beach scenes and even a brief sequence lensed from a bathroom sink POV. Storywise, **Mr. X** incorporates an ingenious hook that finds crooked opportunism, represented by fake medium Alexis (Bey), first conspiring then clashing with pure evil, in the form of killer gigolo Paul (Curtis). Another interesting duality unfolds in the relationship between sensible “widow” Christine (Bari) and impressionable younger sis Janet (O'Donnell), both of whom fall for Alexis' tricks and advances at various points in the proceedings. Though **Mr. X** eschews the usual noir settings—seedy urban sectors with their dive bars and rundown hotels—this ace mystery won't disappoint lovers of the genre.



**KINO LORBER FILMS**  
(\$29.95 Blu-ray each) 11/19  
**NAKED ALIBI** (1954) B&W 88 mins.  
D: Jerry Hopper. Sterling Hayden, Gloria Grahame, Gene Barry, Marcia Henderson, Chuck Connors, Billy Chapin. 86 mins.

Quintessential '50s screen hero Barry, once and future Dr. Clayton Forrester (a name further immortalized on *Mystery Science Theater 3000*) in 1953's *War of the Worlds* and soon-to-be TV lawman *Bat Masterson*, goes the schizo psycho route as Al Willis, a devious sort who leads a double life as a family man/baker and, just a day's drive away, a Border Town gangster. Noir stalwart Hayden turns in typically Sterling work as Captain Joe Conroy, a taciturn top cop who's convinced citizen Willis is responsible for gunning down three of his men. Trouble is, Joe owns a rep for police brutality, not unlike Hayden's character in Andre de Toth's excellent *Crime Wave* (VS #111), issued the previous year, and this time it gets him fired. A determined Joe traces Willis' trail to the latter's sleazy sin-town second home, where the dogged dick's beaten unconscious by Willis' goons, then rescued by urchin Petey (Chapin) and nursed back to health by the latter's sultry neighbor Marianna (the always glorious Grahame), a local dive chanteuse who also happens to be Willis' abused squeeze. While the basics are in place for a cracking crime opus, **Naked Alibi** falls flat in several key departments. Grahame is as great as ever, even lip-synching and zombie gyrating to Cole Porter's "Ace in the Hole" (a performance that ranks right up there with Ida Lupino's sexily comatose rendition of "Again" in 1948's *Road House* [VS #101]), but Barry, on unfamiliar turf, overplays his role as the quick-tempered villain. Lawrence Roman's script never adequately addresses the how and why of Willis' convoluted double life, while his dialogue suffers from a paucity of noir zing. Hopper's pedestrian direction rarely maximizes the impact of his film's grittier scenes, and his Border Town might have benefitted from a bit more atmosphere. Still, **Naked Alibi** is well worth catching for Grahame's scenes. Extras on Kino's Blu-ray include a commentary by film historian Kat Ellinger.

**WOMAN IN HIDING** (1950)

B&W 88 mins.

D: Michael Gordon. Ida Lupino, Stephen McNally, Howard Duff, Peggy Dow, John Litel, Taylor Holmes. 97 mins.

The early '50s proved a busy time for fugitive femmes. In 1950 we saw **Woman in Hiding** and **Woman on the Run** (VS #110), with Ann Sheridan, while the following year witnessed **Missing Women** (VS #110), starring Penny Edwards. Noir veteran Lupino, who'd recently launched



her directorial career with **Not Wanted** (1949) and **Outrage** (1950), dealing with the controversial topics of unwed motherhood and rape, respectively, stars as Deborah Chandler Clark, a mill heiress pressured into marriage by ambitious cad Selden Clark (a convincingly creepy McNally), who's fresh from arranging her wealthy dad's (Litel) "accidental" death. When Selden's jilted mistress Patricia Monahan (a striking Dow) shows up at their honeymoon cabin, gun in hand, Deborah demands an immediate split, accelerating Selden's plans to ice her in an auto mishap. But Deb secretly survives the attempt and, like Julia Roberts in the much-later **Sleeping with the Enemy**, goes on the lam with her angry hubby in eventual pursuit. Like elusive heroine Sheridan in **Woman on the Run**, Deb receives an uncertain assist from a male stranger, in this case educated drifter Keith Ramsey (Duff), who's torn between sparking a romance and turning her in for a promised reward. Director Gordon, late of **An Act of Murder** and **The Lady Gambles**, and writers Oscar Saul and Roy Huggins, adapting James Webb's *Saturday Evening Post* Serial **Fugitive from Terror**, construct a brilliant suspenser that relies as much on credible characters as it does on plot twists. Much of the story is set at a hotel overrun by loud, liquored-up conventioneers, future Stooge Joe Besser prominent among them. Rich in feminist subtext, **Woman in Hiding** benefits mightily from Lupino's subtly powerful presence. Lupino and Duff would wed the following year and work together on screen, most notably in **While the City Sleeps** (VS #107) and the Ida-directed **Private Hell 36** (VS #85), while the charismatic Dow would call it quits after only 10 pics to devote her time to charity work. Extras include a commentary by Kat Ellinger. ♀

**BEST OF THE FESTS:  
2019 BUCHEON  
INTERNATIONAL  
FANTASTIC FILM  
FESTIVAL**  
By Joseph Perry  
& Chris Weatherspoon

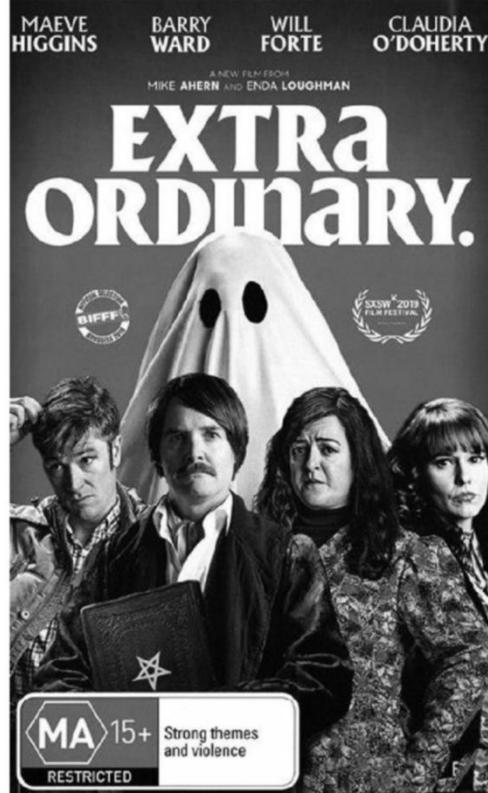
The 23rd Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival (BIFAN), the largest genre-film fest in Asia, unfolded about a month earlier than its preceding editions, running June 27–July 7, and delivered one of its strongest lineups in recent memory. BIFAN hosted horror, thriller, action, and other genre films from around the world. Our thoughts on some of the fest's offerings follow.

**Joseph Perry:** Co-directors Severin Fiala and Veronika Franz follow up their debut shocker **Goodnight Mommy** (VS #96) with **The Lodge**, a knockout punch that won BIFAN's Best Director Choice Special Mention. This gut-wrenching tale of a suicide cult survivor and her attempt to bond with her boyfriend's children is a slow-burner that builds to the most harrowing climax I've seen since Ben Wheatley's **Kill List**. This Hammer Films production sees mother Laura (Alicia Silverstone) drop off her teenage son Aiden (Jaeden Lieberher) and younger daughter Mia (Lia McHugh) at their father Richard's (Richard Armitage) house. Richard's current romantic interest, Grace, wanders around the home like a shadowy, ghostly figure, just out of clear sight. Richard unwisely insists that the youngsters spend Christmas with him and Grace at a remote cabin. As the father and children prepare for the car trip to the snowy location, viewers finally see Grace (Riley Keough, who is amassing a top-notch genre-film resume with this one and previous efforts like **It Comes at Night** and **Under the Silver Lake**). Grace hopes to form a closer relationship with Aiden and Mia, but the two do their best to keep their distance. After Richard is called back to work for a few days, a snowstorm sets in and bizarre events occur. Fiala and Franz keep viewers guessing about how sane or fragile Grace might be after growing up with a charismatic cult leader father who killed himself in a ritual suicide that claimed all the cult members except her and whether supernatural or other sinister forces are at play, with tension reaching nearly unbearable heights. The cast is first-rate, and Keough gives an outstanding performance as a young woman trying to cope with two kids who make no bones about showing their resentment toward her, while Lieberher and McHugh are spot-on as the two youngsters. Thimios Bakatakis (**The Lobster**) contributes breathtaking cinematography, taking full

advantage of a wintry landscape and highlighting the trio's stark isolation. **The Lodge** frays nerves and wears viewers down slowly rather than attempting gory shocks or jump scares. Just try shaking off that ending.

**Chris Weatherspoon:** The Irish horror comedy **Extra Ordinary** marks the feature debut of writing/directing team Mike Ahern and Enda Loughman. Comedian Maeve Higgins (**Inside Amy Schumer**) stars as Rose Dooley, a bumbling spinster who earns her living as a driving instructor; however, Rose is far from an ordinary lonely middle-aged woman, as the movie's title notes. Rose has the ability to communicate with the dead and to exorcise ghosts, but a childhood incident has left her traumatized and for decades she has chosen not to use her gift. This is unfortunate as her small Irish town seems to be teeming with supernatural activities and residents routinely asking for her help. Said residents include the equally awkward but not quite as lonely single dad Martin Martin (Barry Ward), whose wife passed away some time ago but who continues to haunt Martin and his moody, foul-mouthed teenage daughter Sarah (Emma Coleman). Martin comes to Rose for assistance when one-hit wonder American musician Christian Winter (Will Forte) possesses Sarah to serve as a virginal sacrifice to Satan to revive his long-dead career. Martin's only hope for saving his daughter is Rose, but will that be enough to convince her to come out of retirement and use her extraordinary gifts? **Extra Ordinary** will feel both familiar and fresh to horror comedy fans. The film's cheesy mood is set in the opening moments by an informational VHS clip about exorcisms. The tone is kept light throughout, though the directors don't shy away from gore or darker moments. While Higgins does a wonderful job carrying the film, **Extra Ordinary** features a strong supporting cast, including Terri Chandler as Rose's outspoken worldly sister Sailor Dooley and Claudia O'Doherty as Christian Winter's cutthroat wife Claudia. On the surface this might seem like just another silly horror comedy, but a deeper look at the story's themes reveals something more meaningful. At its core, **Extra Ordinary** is really a story about overcoming past trauma and hitting one's stride in middle age. Who couldn't love that message?

**JP:** Latin America was well represented at this year's BIFAN, highlighted by a trio of suspense well worth seeking out. Cuban director Rudy Riveron Sanchez's **Is That You?**—set in a harrowing world of despair dominated by brown, beige, and other muted colors—captured the BIFAN Jury's Choice Award. Lili (Gabriela Ramos) is a suspicious, misguided 13-year-old who seems to love her sadistic, domineering father Eduardo (Osvaldo Doimeadios), despite his cruelty toward her mother Alina (Lynn Cruz), whose feet are bound and who Eduardo forces to live in a pig shed. When Lili and her mother have a chance to escape, the girl spoils the attempt because of her attachment to her father. After



Eduardo suddenly goes missing, Lili comes into contact with a woman who tells her she can bring her father back using black magic. Naturally, things don't go according to plan as a diabolical force asserts itself in this chilling horror movie/psychological thriller. Sanchez's bleak, suffocating work places viewers in the middle of a heinous situation from the beginning and the unease never lets up.

In the Mexican chiller **Feral**, writer/director Andres Kaiser tells the story of troubled priest Juan Felipe (Hector Illanes), who left the church to live an isolated life in the mountains of Oaxaca. He happens across a feral boy (Farid Escalante Correa) in the woods near his home and takes the wild child, who he names Cristobal, under his wing as both a son and a project, trying to teach him how to sit in a chair, walk, communicate verbally, and trust other humans. Kaiser employs static shots, documentary-style footage, and video diaries recorded by Felipe instead of the shaky, jerky camera movements that have given found footage horror films a negative reputation. When two more feral children, discovered chained up in a cave, come to live with Felipe and Cristobal, events grow more dangerous, resulting in a horrific incident revealed at the outset. The documentary sequences are so well directed and acted that they could easily pass for authentic, and the third act delivers a good deal of tension, along with some sadness. Illanes leads a fine cast as the deeply scarred Felipe, while Correa impresses as Cristobal. **Feral** feels wholly original, exploring the conflicts that religion can cause both within individuals and communities. Highly recommended, the film is sure to linger with you long after the end credits roll.

The Uruguayan thriller **In the Quarry** (En El Pozo, 2018) is an effective slow-burner that looks at gender roles and expectations: macho bravado and jealousy lead to a vicious turn of events as four young people spend what they hope to be a fun, relaxing day of barbecuing and swimming at their small town's abandoned quarry. Alicia (Paula Silva), her possessive boyfriend Bruno (Augusto Gordillo), and brothers Tincho (Rafael Beltran) and Tola (Luis Pazos) see their day interrupted when city slicker Bruno repeatedly mocks the brothers for their simple country lifestyles. Alicia is secretly having an intimate relationship with one of the brothers, which doesn't help matters. The ensemble cast is solid, and the co-writing/co-directing team of Bernardo and Rafael Antonnacio keep the pace moving as events gradually escalate into a waking nightmare.

**CW:** Asia had a bevy of genre films on tap at BIFAN. Actor-director Xiao Yang (**Old Boys: The Way of the Dragon**) takes on environmental issues in the fantasy-action comedy **Airpocalypse**. Yang stars as Ma Le, a questionable, opportunistic psychologist and suicide prevention specialist who has seen his business boom because of a widespread spike in depression caused by the thick layer of haze that has blanketed his northern Chinese city. This haze isn't caused by China's industrial pollution but by Yun Baobao, an adorable, misguided Auspicious Cloud deity. Ma Le is summoned by the area's wealthiest man, Bai Xuejing (Xiaoshenyang), who not only claims to be the fallen Chinese God of Thunder but also reveals that he will destroy the world in seven days. Ma Le thinks Bai Xuejing is crazy, but this movie's not called **Airpoca-**

lypse for nothing! After a chance encounter with the God of Longevity (Wang Xiaoli) finds Ma Le imbued with the jovial deity's heavenly powers, the quack doctor is tasked with assembling fellow fallen weather deities the Mother of Lightning (Du Juan), God of Wind (Yi Yunhe) and God of Rain (Chang Yuan) to put an end to Bai Xuejing's malevolent plans. **Airpocalypse** is a formulaic Chinese fantasy action film. From the selfish, reluctant protagonist to the forced romantic storyline, training montage, and cuddly, merchandisable animated character, **Airpocalypse** seems designed to check all the boxes. The story is written around Xiao Yang, giving the comedian time to shine during the film's more ridiculous moments, at the expense of the relatively large ensemble cast. The film could have been a bit tighter, but with so many story elements to fit in, it's a wonder they managed to trim it to 100 minutes. For those just becoming acquainted with Chinese fantasy films **Airpocalypse** can serve as a fun, albeit non-canonical, introduction to Chinese mythology. The movie also features competent visual effects and costume designs. While the plot structure might not feel new, the storyline does have its moments, in addition to its commendable effort to bring attention to environmental issues.

In **Big Brother**, one of Hong Kong's worst performing schools is in danger of being shut down if **The Principal can't Stand and Deliver** better test scores to the school board by the end of the year. Of course, it should be noted that this school operates on an insufficient budget and mostly serves an at-risk group of students who live in **A Town Torn Apart** by broken families, wealth inequality, and even colorism. Enter Henry Chen (Donnie Yen), a tough man with a tattoo and just the right skills to shape these **Dangerous Minds**. With a cool but firm personality, killer fighting skills and a neon glow smile, Teacher Chen tames his **Blackboard Jungle** in no time. However, when a powerful local gangster sets his sights on the school's very desirable plot of land, it might require more than Chen's martial arts skills to keep school from being out forever. Donnie Yen produced and starred in this vehicle, which I'm sure he hopes will demonstrate that his acting range includes more than just kicking things. Though **Big Brother** may occasionally feel cliched and too "feel good," its use of likable characters, timely issues, and good pacing coupled with great martial arts action make the film a joy to watch.

Nothing makes me feel old more than watching a horror film with teens. Why is it that screen teenagers these days are so dumb? The group in the Indonesian horror **DreadOut** (aka **Dreadout: Tower of Hell**) proves no exception. **DreadOut** is based on the Indonesian horror survival computer game of the same name. The game was notable for its use of Indonesian ghosts and legends and became a

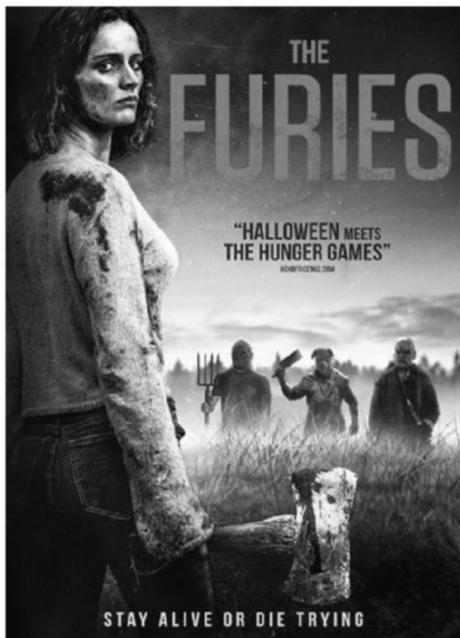


hit internationally, partially thanks to being promoted by PewdiePie, an Internet celebrity and famous YouTuber. Similar to the game, the plot begins when a group of high school students come up with the brilliant idea of broadcasting a live stream of their visit to a creepy, abandoned, and possibly haunted location to increase their social media following. In the movie adaptation, this location is an apartment building. The numskull students are led by Linda (Caitlin Halderman), who, it turns out, knows the building's security guard, so the gang is able to sneak in. Like almost all teen horror flicks, **DreadOut** includes your usual archetypes, such as handsome prince Erik (Jeffri Nichol), rival popular bitch Dian (Susan Sameh), her nice friend Jessica (Marsha Apuan), who just follows along, bully and popular jock Beni (Iryssadilah) and duplicitous, selfish Alex (Ciccio Manaserro). However, as innocent Linda is the main focus, she is also the one who reads a curse while standing over a large demonic symbol, setting the film's supernatural plot in motion. The symbol becomes a pool to an alternate, supernatural dimension inhabited by foul creatures that include zombies and one very persistent demoness in a striking red dress who really wants to kill these idiot kids, who fall down and scream a lot without much cause as **DreadOut** doesn't really have many terrifying moments. Director Kimo Stamboel (**Headshot**) does deserve applause for creating a atmosphere. The creature designs are also quite effective, using both CGI and practical effects to bring some truly memorable undead monsters to life.



**JP:** Go in as fresh as possible to **Come to Daddy**. Director Ant Timpson's genre-bender has many secrets, clever twists, and brilliant performances. It's chockfull of uncomfortable family drama, gruesome set pieces, black humor, and even some poignant moments. Norval (Elijah Wood) travels to a remote beach house to meet the father who abandoned him 30 years earlier. He is nervous about the reunion, and for good reason, as he suffers verbal abuse and physical threats from his highly aggressive, judgmental father (Stephen McHattie). The elder man enjoys taunting his recovering substance abuser son with his own fondness for the bottle and, in a nail-bitingly tense scene, plays a game of mental chess re how well Norval actually knows a certain rock music legend. Wood and McHattie are superb, with Wood essaying Norval with a bewildered gaze and a breaking-point fragility and McHattie giving a bravura villainous performance. And that is merely the first part of **Come to Daddy**! After that, the film takes some tense, engaging, mind-twisting paths as it plays freely with horror, dark comedy, and thriller elements, with plenty of brutality and blood-spilling. Cinematographer Daniel Katz vividly brings the film's extremes of lush landscapes and unsettling gore to life, marvelously capturing Timpson's vision. Michael Smiley, Martin Donovan, Ona Grauer, and Madeleine Sami all have crucial, memorable roles as well.

**CW:** **The Furies** marks writer/director Tony D'Aquino feature debut. Set in the Australian desert, this female-led survival-horror/sci-fi mash-up offers a cast of colorful killers and a twist on the final-girl formula. The film opens with cautious, epileptic-seizure-prone Kayla (Arlie Dodds) having an argument with lifelong best friend and uber-feminist Maddie (Ebony Vagulans). Their disagreement is less a thought-provoking discussion than a convenient way to provide exposition and introduce viewers to Kayla's character arc. Moments after the two part ways, Kayla is abducted and taken to a desolate desert locale where she soon discovers she isn't alone. A grotesque, masked, axe-wielding monster has been assigned to murder her and it's stalking her every move through the cameras that have been implanted into her eyes. There are six other women at the abandoned location, each with her own assigned masked, murderous stalker. When one of the girls meets an untimely, gory demise, Kayla discovers a connection between the victims and their hunters and uses this knowledge to fight back. However, as the body count rises, the girls lose trust in one another, forcing Kayla to seek survival, and revenge, at all costs. **The Furies** doesn't reinvent the wheel for the human-hunting horror genre, but the revealed connection between the "beauties" and the "beasts" injects some interesting game theory into the plot. Slasher-film fans



will love the designs used for the masked creatures, which reference characters from many past horror classics. The story has its tense moments, and D'Aquino succeeds in creating likable victims; however, with such a large cast, some of the characters feel either undeveloped or under-used. As the lead, Dodds is able to carry the film, convincingly conveying Kayla's transformation from sensitive victim to tough, focused avenger. Clocking in at only 88 minutes, **The Furies** feels like it ends with some story still left to tell. Hopefully, D'Aquino will have a chance to share more of this world of beauties and beasts.

After learning of the death of her estranged father, young virtuoso violinist Rose (Freya Tingley) reluctantly decides to visit the mansion she has inherited in the French/Latvian/Russian/U.K. co-production **The Sonata**. Unbeknownst to the world, including her agent and manager Charles (Simon Akbarian), Rose's father was the great Richard Marlow (Rutger Hauer), a brilliant composer who was destined for greatness but who instead disappeared from the public eye after succumbing to his own musical obsessions. When Rose discovers a music score with unusual markings, she works with her manager to decipher it in hopes of performing the piece to honor her late father. However, while unraveling the score's mysterious melody, Rose uncovers secrets about her father's dark past that reveal the sonata's true sinister purpose. **The Sonata** examines themes of personal sacrifice and unchecked obsessions. Freya Tingley's take on Rose, as a strong woman who resents her father but who also wants to offer him redemption, gives the story emotional depth, and audiences will root for her to finish, even though her goal may have unpleasant consequences. Though he has little screen time, the late Rutger Hauer's Richard Marlow manages to maintain a menacing but unseen presence throughout the film. Andrew Desmond has spun a mystery horror film that will keep audiences watching. ♀

## PHANTOM PHEEDBACK

(continued from page 6)

### ALL'S WELL THAT'S ORWELL

Dear Phantom,

I love your magazine but have a couple of comments re: last issue's *Art-House* section. First, how can anyone review any version of **1984** and not mention that it was a warning against the spread of communism in Europe, not a generic warning against totalitarian rule. Orwell was a disillusioned communist starting from his experience during the Spanish Civil War which opened his eyes to the dangers of Soviet influence. The takeover by communist governments of Eastern Europe only confirmed his beliefs. To say it was a warning against any type of dictatorship would be like saying the Pacific Ocean is distinguished because it is wet. Also the Jefferson in Paris review talks of Thomas Jefferson's fathering children through Sally Hemmings as established fact when in reality it is far from conclusive. True Jefferson family DNA has been found in her descendants but it is far from conclusive that it was Thomas Jefferson who it came from and there is more evidence that it came from his nephew who was well known at the time (and historians have documented) to have relations with Jefferson's female slaves. Regardless it is a debatable point. Finally to go back to the **1984** review, the ending of Ms. Naglin's article comparing chants to Big Brother (a not so thinly veiled Stalin)—why the snide political remarks?!?

I love your magazine and find that people from all sides of politics find common ground in its subject matter. I come from a time when people could discuss and share interests and even disagree without insulting each other politically. Please, conservatives and liberals, republicans and democrats, Pro and Anti Trumpers read your great mag, I beg you to stop such politically snide remarks which only serve to insult half your readership. There's so much negative discourse already so try to continue to serve as an Oasis from this!

Regardless of what you respond, I do love your mag. Thanks

—Keith Carroll, Cranford New Jersey

*Nancy Naglin replies: Successful films are ones that generate conversations; the best, most memorable cinema endures because it gets under one's skin.*

*Send your comments and queries to:*

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**Nancy Naglin's  
ART-HOUSE VIDEO**

**BUNUEL IN THE LABYRINTH OF THE TURTLES** (2018) 

D: Salvador Simo. Voice actors: Jorge Uson, Fernando Ramos, Luis Enrique de Tomas, Cyril Corral. 80 mins. (Shout! Factory) 11/19

In 1929, a 16-minute short, **Un Chien Andalou**, which Bunuel made with his closest and later estranged friend Salvador Dali, scandalized the world. Bunuel followed it with the still controversial, riot-producing **L'Age d'Or** (1930 [withdrawn in 1934 and not seen again until 1979]), infamous for linking Jesus with the writings of the Marquis de Sade. Inspired by a graphic novel, **Bunuel**—an intimately beguiling, animated, fact-based reimagining of Bunuel's (Uson) quest to sort through competing influences, curb jejune Surrealist film expressions, and find his directorial voice—begins when he thinks his career is over after having been blacklisted by the Vatican. In a chance encounter, he is presented with a dissertation chronicling the hardships of one of Spain's poorest regions. A sculptor friend, Ramon Acin Aquilue (Ramos), promises to fund Bunuel's poverty-revealing but also pioneering mockumentary-style film, **Las Hurdes: Tierra Sin Pan** (1933), should he win the lottery. **Las Hurdes**, made with the winning ticket, was banned by three Republican governments as well as Franco. **Bunuel**'s authenticity is heightened by frequent cuts to riveting footage from **Las Hurdes**. Unsparring in portraying Bunuel as a crap person—he has to be dissuaded by a rebellious crew from offending townspeople by narcissistically filming himself as a nun; he shoots goats off cliffs and lets donkeys be bitten to death by bees—co-scripter Simo also depicts

Bunuel learning to refine Surrealist pranks into a visual satiric sense. He comes to maturity seeing a child curled up on the street dying and reenacting funerals of children. Bunuel is tormented nightly by his demons—he dreams his disapproving father strangles him—but **Bunuel**, with a brutal honesty and hypnotic spell, succeeds in showing the filmmaker finding his footing. Bunuel's cynicism was not misplaced. Ramon Aquilue and his wife were executed in the Spanish Civil War. In 1960, Bunuel restored the film with Aquilue again credited. Bonus features include the documentary **Bunuel's Prisoners**, an interview with director Simo, and trailers.

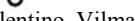
**LA MARSEILLAISE** (1938) B&W

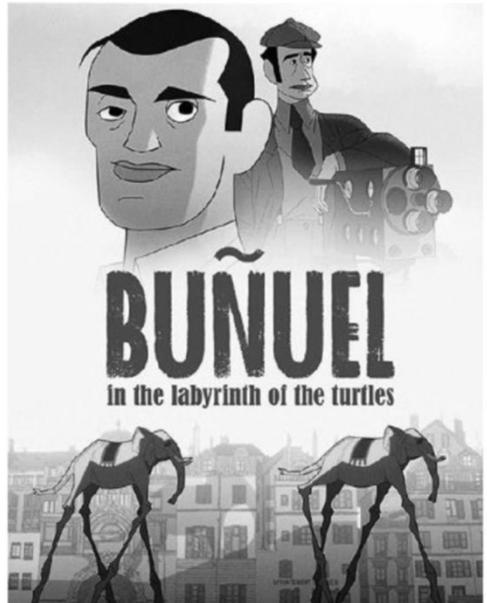


D: Jean Renoir. Pierre Renoir, Lise Delamare, Leon Larive, Andrex, William Aguet, Georges Spinnely, Pierre Nay, Edmond Castel, Edmond Ardisson. 130 mins. (Kino) 11/19

Prolific French auteur and son of painter Pierre Auguste Renoir, Jean Renoir (1894-1979) is best known for **La Grande Illusion** (1937) and **The Rules of the Game** (1939). Sandwiched in between and well worth a viewing is the lesser-known **La Marseillaise**, released on the brink of World War II and, in a coincidental, timely way, warning of upheaval as well as heralding Renoir's socialistic leanings. Unlike other histories, Renoir's film celebrates the awakening of the revolutionary spirit and the early triumphs of the French Revolution by ignoring key players and focusing on ordinary folks. The film is organized newsreel-style, beginning with the storming of the Bastille, July 14, 1789, but in very satisfying fashion plays like **The Longest Day** with an emphasis on human connections and ironies. Louis XVI (Renoir's brother Pierre), lolling in bed and snacking on chicken—at film's conclusion, in a climactically masterfully shot episode, to be marched to the Assembly while his palace is overrun—can't seem to grasp the situation. Not so a Provence peasant sentenced to death for killing a pigeon; he escapes to the countryside to join the level-headed Honore Arnaud (Andrex) and earthy Jean-Joseph Bomier (Ardisson) through whose adventures en route to Paris we see the awakening of a new national consciousness linked to the origins of the *La Marseillaise* anthem. Notable are the sweeping vistas and aerial shots which maximize the fervor of crowds; Renoir relied on cranes. To achieve historical accuracy, many of the king's most poignant lines are lifted from contemporaneous accounts. To Renoir's dismay, the film never caught fire in France but was a huge success in the Soviet Union. Extras include an archival interview with the director by Pierre Tchernia, along with bonus Kino trailers.

**THE EAGLE** (1925) B&W

  
D: Clarence Brown. Rudolph Valentino, Vilma Banky, Louise Dresser, Albert Conti, James A. Marcus, Carrie Clark Ward. 73 mins. (Kino) 10/19



One hundred thousand unruly, grief-stricken fans lined the streets of New York to view Rudolph "The Sheik" Valentino at the Campbell Funeral home when, only 31, he died unexpectedly from peritonitis following surgery for gastric ulcers (a condition now known as Valentino Syndrome). Aka the Latin Lover, Valentino, one of the first mega-pop stars, unwittingly added to his legend with a fraught and unfulfilled personal life. Never divorced from an early marriage, he wed again, unhappily, and was prosecuted as a bigamist. Today, he is remembered for the top silent films **The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse** (1921), one of the first films to earn one million dollars; **The Sheik** (1921), where he abducts an Englishwoman; **Blood and Sand** (1925), a portrait of a bullfighter upended by an affair; **The Son of the Sheik** (1926), a revenge tale about a sheik betrayed by a dancing girl. Watch **The Eagle** to see what made women swoon and jealous men sneer that Valentino was effeminate. Based on an Alexander Pushkin novel, the engaging plot offers Valentino ample opportunity to show off as sex object, sexual pursuer and swashbuckler. Czarina Catherine II (Dresser) spots officer Vladimir Dubrovsky (Valentino) riding off on her favorite horse and right then and there decides he belongs in her bed. Dubrovsky, who had previously flirted with Mascha Troekouroff (Banky), is repelled by the idea. Insulted, the Czarina takes a very willing Kuschka (Conti) as consort and sentences Dubrovsky to death. Meanwhile, Dubrovsky's father has gambled away the family estate to the greedy Kyriilla Troekouroff (Marcus). Love intersects with duplicity as Dubrovsky simultaneously becomes the Zorro-like "Black Eagle" targeting Troekouroff. Mascha can't resist. My great-aunt couldn't, either, and never got over Valentino's death. Judge for yourself whether The Sheik's got the goods! Special features include a 2K restoration from 35mm material, an outstanding new musical score performed by the three-person Alloy Orchestra, and audio commentary by film historian Gaylyn Studlar.



# The Phantom's JOY OF SETS

## FILM FINDS

Shout! Factory presents a treasure trove for A&C devotees with its gala 15-disc **Abbott and Costello: The Universal Pictures Collection: 80th Anniversary Edition** (\$139.95), covering the comic duo from their instant hit debut in **One Night in the Tropics** (1940) to their studio farewell in **Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy** (1955). In addition to assembling the pair's Universal feature films, the set boasts a wealth of bonus material, including the feature-length documentary **The World of Abbott and Costello** (1965). Several noted film historians contribute audio commentaries, from **Mystery Science Theater 3000** alum Frank Coniff (on **Who Done It?**) to author Gregory W. Mank (**Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein**) and the ever-erudite tandem of Tom Weaver and Richard Scrivani (**Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**), while each disc comes equipped with original theatrical trailers and production notes. Other notable extras include **Abbott & Costello Meet Jerry Seinfeld**, **Abbott and Costello Meet the Monsters** (a horrodom who's who that lists Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff, Lon Chaney, Charles Laughton and the voice of Vincent Price in its lineup), **Abbott and Costello:**

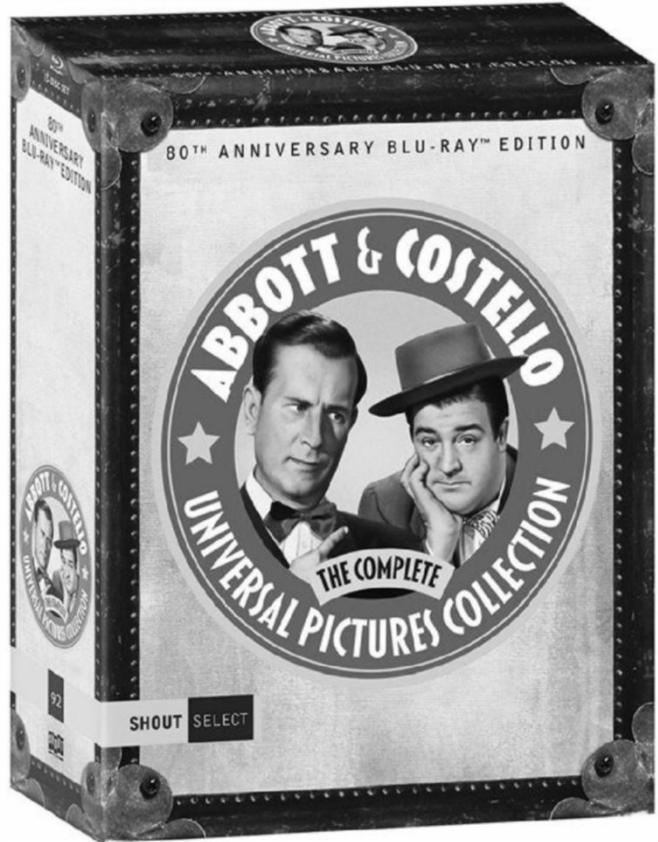
**Their Lives and Legacy**, with Chris (Daughter of Lou) Costello, **Abbott and Costello: Film Stories**, with author James L. Neibaur, **Abbott and Costello: Behind the Scenes**, with A&C expert Ron Palumbo, **Abbott & Costello Meet Castle Films** (a look at the two-some's adventures in 8mm before the advent of video), along with outtakes from several films, and an A&C trailer reel.

On the fear-film front, Scream Factory offers **The Omen Collection** (5-disc), assembling all five franchise entries plus an expansive roster of extras. The original **The Omen** (1976) includes two filmmakers' commentaries, both with director Richard Donner among the commentators, and a film historians' track, multiple featurettes and interviews, an appreciation by late, great genre auteur Wes Craven, a **Trailers From Hell** segment hosted by Larry Cohen, theatrical trailers, still galleries and more. Three sequels—**Damien: Omen II** (1978), **Omen III: The Final Conflict** (1981), **Omen IV: The Awakening** (1985)—and John

Moore's 2006 **The Omen** remake likewise arrive with audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurettes, cast and crew interviews, trailers and more. For an additional take on the property, scope out Tim Ferrante and Scott Voisin's **Split Screen** (page 42).

Shout! likewise salutes actress Anne Bancroft with its **Anne Bancroft Collection**. The set gathers eight feature films, beginning with Roy Ward Baker's offbeat 1952 noir **Don't Bother to Knock**, costarring Richard Widmark and Marilyn Monroe, and concluding with the 1987 drama **84 Charing Cross Road**, featuring Anthony Hopkins and set in the legendary London bookstore founded by Benjamin Marks, father of future **Peeping Tom** scenarist Leo Marks. Also present are such high-profile Bancroft showcases as **The Miracle Worker** (1962), with Patty

Duke, **The Pumpkin Eater** (1964), opposite Peter Finch, as the immortal Mrs. Robinson in Mike Nichols' **The Graduate** (1967), the movie that launched costar Dustin Hoffman, **Fatso** (1980), with Dom DeLuise as the rotund title character, with real-life spouse Mel Brooks in the latter's Ernst Lubitsch remake **To Be Or Not To Be** (1983), and **Agnes of God** (1985), with Jane Fonda. Extras include a vintage Mike Nichols commentary, bonus interviews, multiple featurettes, TV appearances, select isolated music scores, trailers and a 20-page booklet by film historian Alicia Malone.



**Eegah** (The Name Written in Blood!): We first sighted this WTF title slapped on a Deuce marquee during one of our earliest adolescent Times Square walkabouts back in 1962. Now, after a bit of a wait, that vintage Arch Hall Jr. jaw-dropper joins the Limited Edition Blu-ray ranks, in all its garishly over-lit Eastmancolor glory, courtesy of The Film Detective. This timeless tale of a dune-buggy boy (Arch Jr.), his overaged girl (Marilyn Manning), his pith-helmeted dad (Arch Sr., emoting under the alias William Watters) and the still-extant caveman who loves them (well, *her* anyway)—played by future giant James Bond icon Richard (Jaws) Kiel—includes the complete **Mystery Science Theater 3000** episode wherein host Joel Hodgson and his robot friends Crow T. Robot and Tom Servo make mock of the movie. Also onboard is an interesting interview with a now septuagenarian Arch Jr., who may have lost his golden mane but remains a keen anecdotalist, plus a separate chat with Joel Hodgson, who shares his own observations. Only 1500 discs were manufactured, so act now, and welcome to the club.

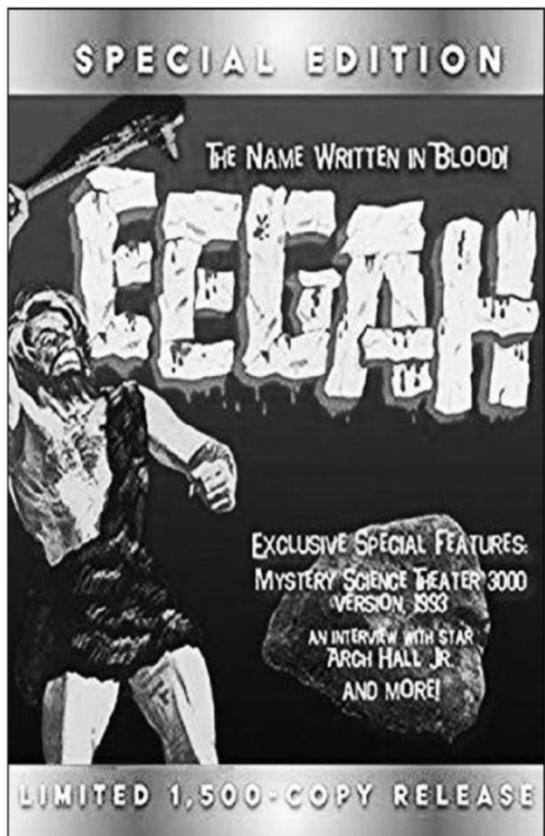
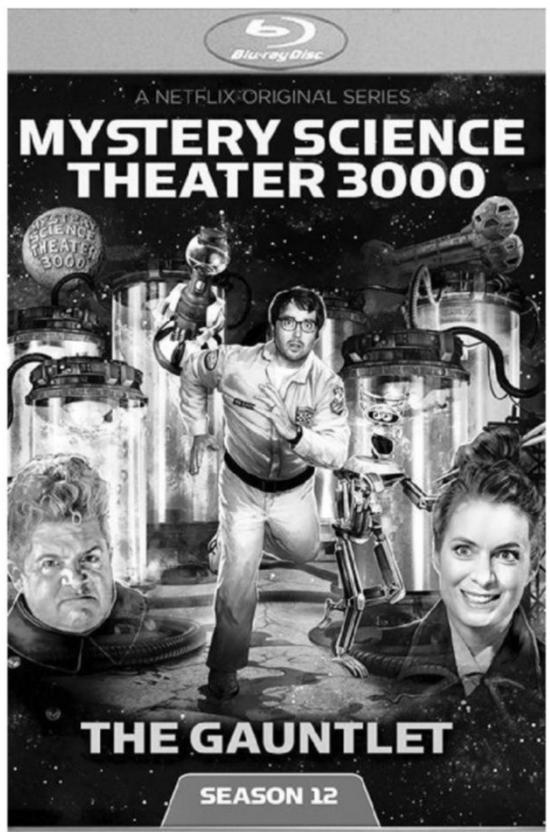
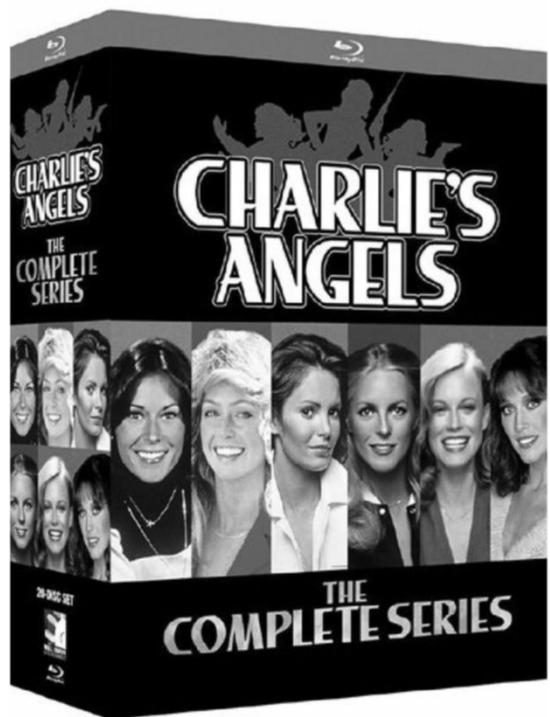
## TELE-VIDEO

And speaking of **MST3K**, Shout! Factory issues the second installment in the new Netflix version of the show, **Mystery Science Theater 3000 Vol. 12—The Gauntlet**. The four-disc set turns the new cast, including actor/stand-up comic Patton Oswalt, Felicia Day (as Kinga Forrester) and host Jonah Ray,

Character actor turned prolific producer Aaron Spelling's trendsetting femme detective action series joins the Blu-ray ranks in a fresh mega-set from Mill Creek Entertainment. The label's 20-disc extravaganza, **Charlie's Angels: The Complete Collection**, contains all 110 uncut 50-minute episodes from the show's initial 1976-1981 run plus the short-lived 2011 reboot. All six iconic Angels, originals and replacements alike—Kate Jackson, Farrah Fawcett-Majors, Jaclyn Smith, Cheryl Ladd, Shelley Hack and Tanya Roberts—are represented, along with their unseen boss Charlie, voiced by David Doyle and John (Kitten with a Whip) Forsythe. Withal, adventures of the "Eye-Popping, Crime-Stopping Trio" consume nearly 102 hours (!), enough to keep the most ardent fan busy for weeks. Mill Creek likewise issues two further titles in the Angels' big-screen spiritual (to speak only of spiritual) successor series, **Andy and Arlene** Sardis' gal-driven actionfests **Hard Hunted** and **Fit to Kill** (both 1993), starring Dona Speir and Roberta Vasquez. Back on the vintage TV front, the label also issues a complete series Blu-ray edition of working-class hero Kevin James in the

long-running blue-collar sitcom **King of Queens** (22 discs), costarring Ricki Lake.

Acorn Media continues to import quality crime shows to these shores. The London-set **Line of Duty Series 5** presents fresh cases tackled by the Anti-Corruption Unit 12, headed by Superintendent Hastings (Adrian Dunbar) and aided by DI Kate Fleming (Vicky McClure) and DS Steve Arnott (Martin Compston). In the same city, a crack murder squad led by DI David Bradford (Hugo Speer) and backed by subordinates DS Vivienne Cole (Sharon Small) and DC Rob Brady (Bailey Patrick) take on tough homicide cases while attempting to resolve pressing personal problems in **London Kills Series 2**. In the medical department, Martin Clunes returns as brilliant but tactless physician Dr. Martin Ellingham in the hit Brit dramedy **Doc Martin Series 9**, costarring



# SINISTER PURPOSE! VIDEO PIONEER GREG LUCE

As Told To  
Rob Freese

Sinister Cinema has been providing collectors with hard-to-find genre films from all over the world for over 35 years. Owner Greg Luce has steered the company from the early Beta and VHS days into the digital era. I caught up with Greg to learn a little about the history of Sinister Cinema, as well as its possible fate in the foreseeable future, and was immediately swept up in his enthusiasm, energy and genuine love for these old drive-in movies.—RF

ROB FREESE What were your interests as a kid, particularly in film?

GREG LUCE I grew up liking old horror and science fiction films. I was buying *Famous Monsters of Filmland* every month, *Horror Monsters*, *Mad Monsters*, once in a while a *Castle of Frankenstein*. I grew up in Walla Walla, Washington, and Pendleton, Oregon. We had *Chiller Theater* out of Spokane. You know, "Every Friday night, Channel 4 takes you on a trip to the weird, the shocking and the macabre!" They'd show the old Universals. Then later on, Channel 2 KATV in Portland had a show called *Sinister Cinema*. When I was starting Sinister Cinema, I was thinking of names for my company and I liked that one. It wasn't in use anymore. So the name stuck and that was back in 1984.

RF Did your early years include a lot of nights at the drive-in?

GL Well, I owned the Frontier Drive-in in the 1990s. That was in Cave Junction, Oregon. We'd go to the Skyview in Walla Walla and the Roundup in Pendleton. I actually worked at the Roundup in 1969 or '70. They were still running these old classic intermission reels from the '50s and '60s. That one year I worked there, I really fell in love with drive-in theaters. I got to know what they were all about. I'd go to drive-ins occasionally but I never got serious about buying one until I was in my 40s. One became available and I bought it. I ran it for five years as a kind of side business in addition to Sinister Cinema and it was fun. We never lost money but we never made a whole lot of money. But I really enjoyed doing it and I'm really glad that I did.

RF How did Sinister Cinema come to be?

GL When you're growing up, you were a slave to the television stations in your area or on your cable system. Whatever film packages they rented from the studios, that's what you got to see. So you could go your whole youth without seeing *Doctor X* (1932), with Lionel Atwill, just because the TV station in your market didn't carry that particular package. Some areas, you'd have the *Shock Theater* package. I never really saw Monogram until I was in my late teens. So when I started watching things like *Return of the Ape Man* (1944), it was a new world. I used to record these things on [audio] cassette, the soundtrack. I'd have a speaker under my pillow [listening to] *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942). It got to be where I could recite the dialogue perfect. So when VCRs came out, I kind of went crazy. Back in those days, a VHS T-120 was 20 to 25 dollars. It was an expensive hobby. What I started doing was subscribing to magazines like *Movie Collector's World*. I'd see these little personal ads in there from other collectors, looking for this, looking for that. I got to where I had this whole long-distance group of friends who had movies playing on TV in their areas that I didn't have in mine. Someone might trade me a VHS of some film I'd never seen before and I'd send them something they'd never seen before. This was before the Internet. It was this group of horror film and science fiction film fans. We were trading all around the country. We actually got to the point where we were renting films from Films Incorporated, Kit Parker Films, and places like that. Then putting them on our projectors, projecting them on our wall and using our cameras to capture the image right off the bedsheet or whatever it was that we used. I remember I was on the phone with Kit Parker one day, 1983 or 1984, lamenting the fact that I love getting all these old movies but it sure is an expensive hobby. And he said to me, "Why don't you sell some of these and make up the cost of your hobby?" I didn't know anything about copyright law. I went, "How could I do that?" He said, "You know, a lot of these films that you cherish so much, the copyrights have expired on them, like a lot of the Monograms and the PRCs, a lot of the AIPs." Well, at the time, some of the AIPs. And all these obscure studios and even a few hits and misses with some of the major studios. I mean, *Most Dangerous Game* (1932), that's one. So I started selling movies. I started with three VCRs. I had a Beta machine and a couple VHS and I was taking stuff I recorded off the air and making copies of it. I had these little hand-written or typed 3x5 index cards, ads that I'd send into *Movie Collector's World* and people would send me money for movies and it helped make up the cost of the hobby. I think my first ad said, "Horror Video." And then I think the next month, I changed it to "Monster Movies." And then the third month, the



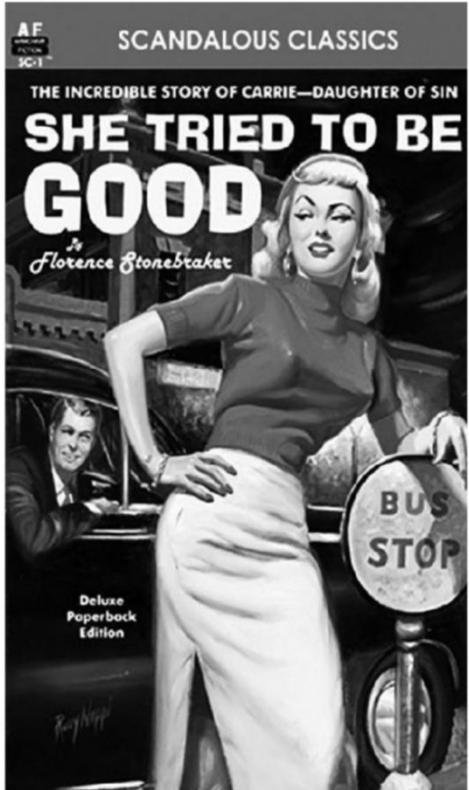
third ad, I changed the name to "Sinister Cinema" and it stuck. And you know, being that I was a screaming Top 40 disc jockey, living in various big markets like Phoenix and San Francisco—I worked at KMEL [San Francisco] and my on-air name was Sonny Joe Fox—I eventually hooked up with a television station in San Jose, The Classic Movie Channel, a cable access channel. They heard me on the radio, and this guy from the station called and said, "Hey, we'd like you to host a horror movie show." I did this for five years. Instead of taking payment—I already had Sinister Cinema going at this point—they said, "Any public domain films you bring to us, we will transfer for you and give you video masters," which at the time was just a SVS video master and then a 3/4 inch. I started bringing them films they transferred. We shot our shows at the Winchester Mystery House. Once a month we'd do four shows at a time, and I'd have guests on, people from the Bay area. I interviewed everyone from Greg Kihn, the rock 'n' roll star who sang "Jeopardy," to William K. Everson, one of the foremost film historians of the latter half of the 20th Century. We had a lot of fun. The perk for me, I got total access to their film library. It was like fifteen hundred public domain films, all transferred onto 3/4. That's when I actually met Kit [Parker]. He was involved with this station. So that's how Sinister Cinema started.

**"So you could go your whole youth without seeing Doctor X, with Lionel Atwill, just because the TV station in your market didn't carry that particular package."**

**Greg Luce**

*RF* Have you always been a mail order company?

*GL* We were never really built to go into stores like Walmart and stuff like that because the return policies would have just killed us. I mean, you sell ten thousand units, and then they want to send nine thousand back. We just weren't set up for that. In the early days, it was just our mailing list and our advertisements and then there were some companies that would buy our product, who were kind of distributors, like Movies Unlimited. I had this great relationship with them for years and years. They were my number one customer. They bought thousands and thousands of VHS, DVDs they would distribute to their customers. There were other companies, where they would buy multiple units of one title and multiple units of another title and then they would put them in their stores. There were these little chains of three or four stores. But it was never on a big level, with national chains. We just were never set up for it.



*RF* I think Sinister Cinema was the first company to put two movies with trailers and a full intermission together on one tape for an authentic night at the drive-in. Where did that idea come from?

*GL* Well, you know, I certainly was not the first company to offer double features on tapes. Many did that before me. But I remembered my old days at the Roundup Drive-in Theater in Pendleton, OR. We'd have trailers and then we'd have the first movie. Then we'd have intermission and we'd have those glorious countdown reels, the intermission reel, and then the second movie. And then after the second movie, it would say, "Thanks for coming!" So when I bought the Frontier in the early '90s, I had already been doing double features for a while but I really paid a lot of attention to acquiring old intermission reels from various collectors. I sold most of them off, but at one time I'm pretty sure I had the largest collection of 35mm drive-in intermission material in the world. But the inspiration came from when I actually worked at a drive-in, because that's the way they did it. And so I thought, "Hey, wow! What a great thing. Make it like an old drive-in from the 1950s or '60s."

*RF* Are the drive-in double feature discs still popular?

*GL* They were very popular for years. We still sell them. They're not near as popular as they used to be because, honestly, it's getting to the point where the baby boomers are getting smaller and smaller. I've lost near all my B Westerns crowd. We always get a few young customers going in, but it's still mainly the old guys, like me, who grew up with this stuff and the audience is shrinking every year. But, boy, the ones we have left are really loyal. I'm so grateful to them.

*RF* Was it a relatively easy migration when you went from VHS to DVD?

*GL* It was kind of a nightmare! All of us small companies were on DVD-R. That actual standard DVD format is an expensive format to master in. But DVD-R, you just hook it up to your film chain. You could transfer 16mm and 35mm directly onto a DVD-R disc or  $\frac{3}{4}$ " master or both. In the early days of DVD-R, they brought that to the market place before it was really ready. They'd be perfect when you made them, but then the dyes would settle and it would cause the information on the disc to pixilate. It was horrible. I'd make a master from 16mm and three months later it was dead. All these discs were going bad and all we could do was replace them but sometimes the replacements would go bad. The industry finally came out with a good DVD-R blank disc that wasn't going to give you too much trouble. But we noticed that the cheap DVD players



had all kinds of problems. I would always tell people, "Get a Sony. Don't get yourself a cheap \$49 DVD player. It's not worth it." You know, maybe they'll play big market stuff but they're not going to play DVD-Rs very well. It would be maddening because we'd have discs that played perfectly on our machine but wouldn't play on our customers'. What do you do? All you could do is say, "I'm sorry. I'll send you another disc." And in some cases, if they didn't want to upgrade their equipment, you were forced with just giving them their money back. We always tried to be as good as we could to our customers.

*RF* Did you have any customers resistant to changing from the VHS format?

*GL* Yeah, there were some VHS people that just did not want to change. We discontinued VHS in July 2019. We were still selling VHS to our customers. Finally, it got to be such a low percentage it was getting harder and harder to find VHS products, playing stock, stuff like that. It was kind of like when we eliminated Beta all those years ago. But even to this day I still have some groups of pre-recorded VHS, so we still sell things we got from other companies. I've got several dozen copies of *Die, Monster, Die* (1965), with Boris Karloff, we bought twenty years ago. Some of them are still selling. As far as getting blank VHS tape and doing any title our customers want, that ended.

# “Who would have thought Flying Saucers Over Istanbul would have ever been released on the video market?”

## Greg Luce

RF What can you tell us about your publishing company, Armchair Fiction?

GL In the past, if you wanted to come out with your own line of paperbacks, it wasn't worth it unless you printed a couple thousand copies of each book. Then along comes CreateSpace with this new technology and they charge you the same price for just a couple of copies. We started Armchair Fiction in 2010. I used to read Ace Doubles and Ace books, all that stuff. Then I thought, wow, to be able to do the same thing with fiction that I've done with movies, it's terrific! To date we have over 400 books. It's a labor of love.

RF What went into putting those legendary annual Sinister Cinema catalogs?

GL The catalogs were basically cut and paste. I had envelopes and envelopes of artwork and wanted to keep the catalogs looking as good and fresh as possible. In the early days, I had just thousands of pieces of artwork. I literally cut and pasted all of it. That's how I did it for years and it worked.



RF I wondered if you had people who wrote those synopses or if you wrote them yourself.

GL I wrote every one of those things! Some of them are just quickies. You can see my writing style popping up over and over again. You can really tell when I liked a movie. That's an advantage I had over most of my competitors. I really loved the stuff I sold. Not all of it. But if I really loved a movie, you could tell by the way I wrote it up.

RF When did Sinister start feeling the sting from streaming services and the push away from physical media?

GL It's weird. My customers are really loyal, but there's been a slow drain in the last ten, fifteen years. Three catalogs ago now, I put on the cover, "Will this be the last Sinister Cinema catalog?" You know, people really responded. We had a really great year. This was in 2017. The previous year we hadn't done that well. It was falling off because of streaming and a couple million other things. I'll be honest. Sinister Cinema is an outdated company. We don't do Blu-ray; it's still DVD-R. We're behind the times. The customers that had stayed with us seemed to love us, but it is dwindling year after year. So, in '17 I put that on the catalog, floating the idea it might be the last Sinister Cinema catalog. You know, the people responded really well. We had the best year in several years. So right now, I'm leaning towards keeping it open as long as it's viable financially. But when it slips below a certain threshold, there's no point in losing money. Working fifty hours a week to make ten dollars in profit doesn't make sense. Instead of doing a catalog, I'll do a flyer when the catalog would have normally come out. The flyer will have all the new releases that would have gone into the catalog. All these wonderful customers who don't like change and never bought computers, they're gonna have to break down, get a computer, get on the internet and visit the Sinister Cinema website. The website will have everything that would have been in the catalog.

RF Does Sinister Cinema still have new titles for future release?

GL The fact of the matter is there is a finite number of films, so one of these days I'm going to run out of new stuff to release. That was always the key for us. Every year, a couple of times a year, I'd bring out stuff that really wasn't out there. In recent years I've been dependent on foreign sources. We get films in that really haven't been around much in the United States that are, you know, classic old black-and-white horror and science fiction and fantasy and mystery, too, from the '30s, '40s and '50s that no one has ever

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LE VIGAN, GUISOL, AIMOS, CHRISTIANE DELYNE, GARETTE  
Adaptation et dialogue de H. G. CLAUZOT J. VILLARD  
Distribué par Paramount

seen before. Like **The World Will Tremble** (1939), with Erich Von Stroheim. What a great little science fiction film that was. This year was **The Phantom Wagon** (1939). That was a really cool movie. **The Wandering Jew** (1933), with Conrad Veidt, that's another really good film. Last year we had **The Student of Prague** (1935). I'd heard about that one for years but I hadn't seen it. It is a great film. We have enough product to last a while longer. It is amazing to me. Whenever I think there's nothing else left for me to release, I keep turning up this stuff. Who would have thought **Flying Saucers over Istanbul** (1955) would have ever been released on the video market?

RF One you turned me on to that I really enjoyed was **Uncle Was a Vampire** (1959).

GL It was a real good film. I had never heard of it before and we got it in. Another one, **The Living Dead** (1932), with Paul Wegener, the guy who played **The Golem**; that is a tremendous little horror film. God, what a great movie. You know, I go, "Wow! Why didn't these films get released in the United States, dubbed in English in the '30s and '40s? I didn't understand it. Well, here they are now. It's been a lot of fun. I think we're the last of the old-time mom-and-pop video companies. I wasn't the first, but I think I go back farther than just about anyone. I'm like the last relic of a bygone era of video. When Sinister closes up shop one of these days, it'll be kind of a sad day, but I've got hundreds of titles on Amazon, books and films. Even if I were to shut everything down tomorrow, you're still going to get Sinister product through Amazon. Sinister will be around for a long time. ♀

## Rob Freese's DRIVE-IN DELIRIUM!

### SINISTER CINEMA DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE #172

#### A SWINGIN' AFFAIR (1963) ♀♀♀

D: Jay O. Lawrence. Arline Judge, William Wellman, Jr., Baynes Barron, Susan Sturridge, Sandra Bettin, Dick Dale, 79 mins.

Fraternity pledge Johnny Kwalski (Wellman, Jr.) works hard at his studies and does everything he's told to do by his frat bros, but he has a secret he doesn't want getting out. Johnny is a poor kid, from the wrong side of town, and he only affords college by moonlighting as boxer Kid Gallant. He's good, good enough that his trainer Sam (Barron) and mother Marge (Judge) think he could be a contender for the championship belt. Johnny wants none of it and spends time studying and making important contacts for his future as an engineer. Johnny won't give his long-time gal Sally (Sturridge) the time of day once sorority kitten Leslie (Bettin)

notices him, so Sally starts dating the fraternity president to make Johnny jealous. Leslie learns Johnny's secret and threatens to spill the beans. The pressure is on for some quick cash, and Johnny bets everything on one last fight. This is a terrific drive-in drama that does a wonderful job balancing all these characters and subplots. The film literally explodes onto the screen in the opening scene with the shredding surf guitar of Dick Dale & The Del-Tones' "Misirlou." (You're forgiven if you thought Tarantino used it first.) Dale is playing the opening frat party and shows up again, as himself, in a couple scenes with the characters. Wellman, Jr. delivers a pretty intense performance as the reluctant pugilist, while Sturridge shines as his longsuffering gal pal. The movie sends a reverse message. Most stories like this, the kid sees a future in sports and everyone tries to talk him into concentrating on his studies. Here, Johnny only sees a future for himself if he has an education, while everyone else believes his future is being punched in the face repeatedly. The on-screen title for this print is actually **Rebel in the Ring**. This was helmer Lawrence's sole directing credit, but he did work in different capacities on films like **House of the Black Death** (1965) and **Manos, the Hands of Fate** (1966). Watch for Teri Garr in her film debut as sorority girl Lisa.



#### MOONSHINE MOUNTAIN (1964) ♀♀

D: Herschell Gordon Lewis. Charles Glore, Gordon Oas-Heim, Jeffrey Allen, Bonnie Hinson, Carmen Sotir, Ben Moore, 83 mins.

Big-time folksinger Doug Martin (Glore) decides to get off the grid for a couple weeks and spend time in the Carolinas, "living with the people the way they live and working on new music." It's not long before Doug is conked on the head and hillbilly Raf (Moore) "trades" clothes with him so he can wear Doug's "fancy jacket." Doug comes to and is riding around when he encounters Jeb Carpenter (Allen) and his kinfolk pickin' and singin' in the front yard. Doug immediately endears himself to Jeb, as well as his daughter Laura (Hinson), and is soon pickin' and singin' along with them. The Carpenters invite Doug into their home and that night take him to a hootenanny where many of the locals perform. They pour just enough shine down old Doug's gullet that he plays a tune for them and quickly passes out. There's trouble afoot, with federal men from D.C. poking around asking questions, then up and disappearing. Sheriff Potter (Oas-Heim) seems to be blowing the federal agents off while conspiring to do his own crooked business on the side. Doug gets into hot water with his big-city girl Angeline (Sotir), who shows up at Doug's

hotel tied in a knot about him being gone, only to later disappear after Potter pulls her over for driving under the influence of being so dang sexy. It all comes to an explosive ending with Doug managing to sort of be the hero. If you're a Lewis fan, you owe it to yourself to give this backwards cornpone hillbilly romp a watch. Lots of familiar faces here, like Moore and Allen (from **Two Thousand Maniacs**) and **Color Me Blood Red**'s Adam Sorg, under his real name Oas-Heim. The acting is at community theater level, with everyone practically yelling their lines (so the back row can hear), but there are some really great little character moments along the way. (The old coot at the general store and the hotel desk clerk totally steal their scenes.) Allen is pretty funny and larger than life again, just like he was in **Maniacs**, but it is Sotir who is the real showstopper. She makes a heck of an impression in the limited time she's on screen. "This here story was writ by hand by Charles Glore," who also starred as Doug (under the alias Chuck Scott) and did his own singing and picking. After working on a couple films with Lewis, it appears his time in movies ended. This was the film Lewis made immediately after splitting with his partner David Friedman. For whatever reason, a novelization was released and it is quite a rare collectible today. **Moonshine Mountain** is a really fun flick that would have been a hoot catching on a hot summer night at a Southern drive-in. ♀



**DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE #185****THE MURDER CLINIC (1966) ♀♀♀**

D: Elio Scardamaglia. William Berger, Francoise Prevost, Mary Young, Barbara Wilson, Philippe Hersent, Harriet Medin. 83 mins.

Mary (Wilson) is a new nurse at a remote clinic for the slightly insane. Dr. Robert Vance (Berger) heads the clinic and has an eye for his young nurses, despite his disapproving wife Elizabeth (Young). Vance is doing skin graft experiments, then dumping the bodies in shallow graves in a nearby cave. One night he's spied upon by a crooked murderer, Gisele de Brantome (Prevost), a beautiful seductress who blackmails the doctor. Vance brings her home and puts her up in one of the rooms, much to the disgust of his wife and crotchety head nurse Sheena (Medin), who suspects Gisele is up to no good. It doesn't take long for Gisele to start hearing strange noises in the room above her, which leads to the discovery of a horrible creature living in the attic. This is a pretty entertaining Euro thriller that delivers a satisfying mix of the horror and giallo genres, offering everything from Gothic thrills to a black-gloved fiend. Viewers are rewarded with copious chills along the way. If you're a scholar of all things drive-in, you have at least seen snippets of it in the famous John Austin Frasier "Avalanche of Horror" triple bill trailer wherein Mr. Frasier loses his mind watching the terror show. **The Murder Clinic** appeared on the bill under the title **Revenge of the Living Dead**. (The other two features were Mario Bava's **Kill, Baby...Kill!** [1966] under the title **Curse of the Living Dead** and Armando de Ossorio's **Malenka**

[1969] as **Fangs of the Living Dead**. It's sad to report that, all these years later, Mr. Frasier still resides at the State Facility for the Mentally Damaged.) Berger is great to watch as he plays up the sketchier aspects of his character, while Prevost is perfect as the femme fatale. Medin is terrific as the matriarchal head nurse; most will recognize her from a long career in genre films as she appeared in everything from **Death Race 2000** (1975) to **Blood Beach** (1980) to **The Terminator** (1984). (She was also in number of Mario Bava and Riccardo Freda films.)

**THE DEVIL'S MISTRESS (1965) ♀♀1/2**

D: Orville Wanzer. Joan Stapleton, Robert Gregory, Wes Moreland, Douglas Warren, Oren Williams, Arthur Resley. 66 mins.

Four cowboys making a long trek across desert country stumble on a lone, dilapidated homestead in the middle of nowhere. A couple of the boys are excited to meet Athaliah (Stapleton), a mute young lady living with creepy Jeroboam (Resley), who has the appearance of a warlock or necromancer. After Frank (Gregory) suspects them of serving human flesh in the stew, the boys kill Jeroboam and drag Athaliah along with them.



After two of the men rape Athaliah they are found dead, totally drained of life. Frank tries to get away from her, but she sticks with him. Always in the distance a cloaked figure is following them and getting ever closer. Athaliah gets crazier and crazier until she goes all loco on the cowboys and is reunited with whatever it is lurking just beyond the cactus. It's never really spelled out if Athaliah is a ghost or a vampire or a witch or a bride of Satan or spirit of vengeance or whatever, and I don't think it matters. Whatever she is, it works.

**The Devil's Mistress** belongs to that small group of genre films known as the Horror Western, a terror story dropped within the set dressing of a classic shoot-'em-up. This one benefits from its low budget and actually delivers a tightly paced little chiller. There are no big scare payoffs, but the whole film has a very weird fever dream ambiance that makes a couple scenes truly disturbing. Seems this was a "one-shot" venture for most of the cast and crew involved. The film has a kind of **Twilight Zone** morality play vibe going for it. (In fact, with 10 minutes shaved off it could probably work as an hour-long **Zone**.) Costar Warren, who plays Joe, was also the film's composer. I would never try to convince anyone this is some kind of lost classic, but it is a decent "bottom of the bill" feature and paired with **The Murder Clinic** helps make for a solid night of cheap thrills. As with all the Sinister Cinema double feature discs, this is a full night at the drive-in with coming attraction previews before the first show and a full intermission between movies. (In fact, the intermission on this disc, as well as double feature discs #184 and #186, are authentic intermission reels once used at the Frontier Drive-in in Cave Junction, Oregon.) Just the thing to get you through the winter slump before the drive-ins open back up for business in the spring. ♀

**Rob Freese's****3-D DRIVE-IN!****KINO LORBER**

(\$29.95 Blu-ray) 10/19

**PARASITE 3-D (1982) ♀♀♀**

D: Charles Band. Robert Glaudini, Demi Moore, Luca Bercovici, Al Fann, Vivian Blaine, James Davidson. 85 mins.

In the future world of 1992, society has crumbled and most cities are work camps, lorded over by the evil corporate "Merchants," with vast spans of wasteland between. Dr. Paul Dean (Glaudini) comes to a small desert town to continue his experiments on the parasite growing in his gut. He meets Collins (Fann), who runs the local watering hole, and a band of future punks led by the insanely obnoxious Ricus (Bercovici). Patricia Welles (Moore) is a local gal who grows lemons and gets beat up when Wolf (Davidson), a Merchant on the hunt for Dean and his parasitic specimens, comes calling. This early sci-fright effort from Band showcases some fantastically slimy creature effects and gore courtesy of Stan Winston, plus a lot of kooky characters. Glaudini makes for a strange leading man, but it works since he's got a parasite growing in his gut, so his character is sickly and doesn't interact well with others. The rest of the cast is rounded out by Runaways rocker Cherie Currie, Broadway and '40s/50s musical starlet Blaine, comedic actors Scott Thompson and Tom Villard, drive-in diva Cheryl "Rainbeaux" Smith and Moore's first husband, rock 'n' roller Freddy Moore. The high marks for this film are awarded exclusively to the 3-D version, which the 3-D Film Archive has done a wonderful job restoring. Every bloody, grizzled bit of monster grue drips or flies off the screen into your lap. It's a gimmick movie and should be judged on its gimmick. If you're not watching **Parasite** in all its fantastical dimensional glory, you should take a full Ro-Man off that rating, at least. Viewed flat, without the added dimensional effects to keep you distracted, the film seems hopelessly slow and padded. (The flick was designed for theaters, to be watched through paper glasses, and should be experienced in as close a manner to that as possible.) Special features are stacked and include copious interviews and featurettes, commentary by screenwriter Alan J. Adler, TV spots and trailer, image gallery and more. Band has always held science fiction dear to his heart, but his budgets were never adequate enough for some of the projects he tackled. Happily, his enthusiasm shines through and **Parasite 3-D** proves to be so Band it's good. ♀

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See page 4 for details.

SINISTER CINEMA  
(\$16.95 each DVD)

TENDER DRACULA (1974) **88**

D: Pierre Grunstein. Peter Cushing, Alissa Valli, Bernard Menes, Miou-Miou, Stephane Shandor. 88 mins.

Cushing is MacGregor, a famous horror actor best known for his Dracula movies who wants to quit the terror biz and start making romance pictures. Two bumbling writers, along with a pair of actresses, are hired to travel to MacGregor's castle and convince the actor to stay in horror. We meet MacGregor's loopy wife and geek servant, who was the wife's first husband. In no time, the gals strip down to take a bath but only blood runs through the pipes. The writers stage some frightening scenes to scare MacGregor to his senses, but then it seems someone is playing the same kind of tricks on them. Or are they tricks? Is MacGregor a real vampire? We get musical numbers, long moments of weird nakedness, and grown people running around dark hallways like they're in a *Scooby-Doo* cartoon. Love wins out and it all ends with an ugly, awkward orgy. This French horror-comedy might be going for a *Young Frankenstein* vibe, but I missed it completely. I obviously don't get French humor. A couple of the gags between the writers are funny, but I have a hard time imagining a French cinema filled with a delighted audience, laughing their way from the nonsensical opening credits to the final moments where maybe the castle is blasting into space (I'm not really sure what happened). Most sources report a 98-minute running time, but this version of *Tender Dracula* (aka *The Big Scare*) is a merciful (if somewhat still a challenge to sit through) 10 minutes shorter. While it's overflowing with nudity and some decent gore effects, the film's main saving grace is Cushing, who finally gets to play Dracula. He delights more than disappoints whenever he is on screen. (Cushing always had a gift for elevating everything he was in.) This is definitely "something different" for when you're in that kind of mood.

UNCLE WAS A VAMPIRE (1959) **888**

D: Steno. Renata Rascel, Sylvia Kosciusko, Lia Zoppelli, Franco Scandurra, Susanne Luret, Christopher Lee. 97 mins.

Osvaldo Lambertenghi (Rascel) is forced to sell his ancestral castle to pay his mountain of debt. He is hired on as a porter when the castle is transformed into a resort hotel. Not long after, he receives a letter to expect his long-lost uncle, Baron Roderico Frankurten (Lee), for an extended visit. Uncle is expected on a midnight train but only an oversized trunk arrives. When Osvaldo gets back to the castle and finds a coffin in the trunk, he starts putting the pieces together. Roderico appears and starts stalking some of the more delectable hotel guests. During the



day, Osvaldo takes a book his uncle had to Professor Stricker (Scandurra), a hotel guest, to get it translated. He learns how to safeguard against vampires and does everything he can to protect pretty gardener Lilly (Luret), who secretly loves him. Determined to stake his uncle, Osvaldo bumbles every attempt and ends up getting bitten and transforming into a nighttime vamp who goes around putting the bite on all the pretty female guests. This Italian comedy-horror (the first Italian-made vampire movie) goes for an *Abbott & Costello Meet Dracula* feel and more than succeeds in delivering a number of big laughs along the way. Rascel is like a one-man comedy team, playing both straight man and jester. He's quite hilarious when he's stalking his uncle and then stalking the ladies. Lee plays it straight, appearing much the same as he did in Hammer's *Horror of Dracula* (1958), but he does get to take a pratfall as well as joke it up at the end. This version is in color and runs 12 minutes longer than what most sources report. (This may be the full theatrical version, which was a hit in Italy. It appeared on Stateside TV around 1964 and that version may be the one seen more often over the years.) Although I think many critics have dismissed it as a forgettable farce that wasted Lee's talent, I found it to be a completely enjoyable and delightful comic horror flick that delivered the expected chuckles. **8**

—Rob Freese

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(\$11.99 3-DVD) 11/19

BIGFOOT MOVIE COLLECTION:

SHRIEK OF THE MUTILATED (1974) 86 mins. CURSE OF BIGFOOT (1963/75) 88 mins. THE LEGEND OF BIGFOOT (1976) 75 mins. SNOWBEAST (1977) 86 mins. **881/2**  
D: Michael Findlay, Dave Flocker (as Don Fields), Harry Winer, Herb Wallenstein. Jennifer Stock, Bob Clymire, Ivan Marx, Yvette Mimieux.

A recent Alpha Video sales flier had an irresistible bit of copy that heralded "Bigfoot Movie Collection—Four movies from the Bigfoot craze of the 1970s on 3-DVDs!" It was an attention-getting pitch no self-respecting **VS** critic could ignore. But all of them did, so I'm writing it instead. The bundle is a repackaging of the company's existing releases, hence the inclusion of *Cathy's Curse* (1977) going along for the double-feature ride with *Curse of Bigfoot*. After this four movie binge, you'll believe that *Shriek of the Mutilated* is a good movie. *Whaaaa...?* Michael Findlay's canoodling with psycho cannibal cultists has more action and wild visual appeal than the other three combined. I admit to partiality since writer/producer Ed Adlum is someone I would run into at trade shows. I was publishing a coin-op collector magazine and he was (and still is) publishing one for the coin-op industry. Even though *Shriek's* Bigfoot is a costumed cannibal, it's more effective than the glimpse we get of the real deal in *Snowbeast*. The Universal made-for-TV movie originally aired on NBC in 1977 and is often cited as *Jaws* (1975) at a ski resort. A Bigfoot creature is murdering skiers and the like, threatening a big bash cancellation and bad press. It's all very tedious nonsense with a cut-rate last-reel reveal of the Snowbeast via three one-second camera cuts (!), one of which is a partial view. Meantime, *Curse* is a curio culled and created using a shelved movie as its flashback story and newer footage as the segue. Similar to *Shriek*, the Bigfoot qualification is arguable, but a doofus monster and the utilization of Ralph Carmichael's *Climactic Curtain* finale cue from *The Blob* (1958) as its closing music are momentary highlights. If you enjoy watching animals endlessly futz about in the wild, *The Legend of Bigfoot* delivers. This Bigfoot travelogue of sorts features adventurer Ivan Marx and is strictly for those who believe his insistence that his Bigfoot footage is authentic and not a hairy hoax. It sure looks convincing, but so did Rick Baker as King Kong. Marx's emotive narration is hypnotic, however, and makes this otherwise dull slog into something that's damn near compelling. Even though all of the titles are widely available from other sources, opt for the Alpha editions if only for its consistently fabulous box art. **8**

—Tim Ferrante

**David-Elijah Nahmod's  
HAMMER  
HORROR-RAMA!**

**BLACK MAGIC ACTS!  
SCREAM FACTORY**

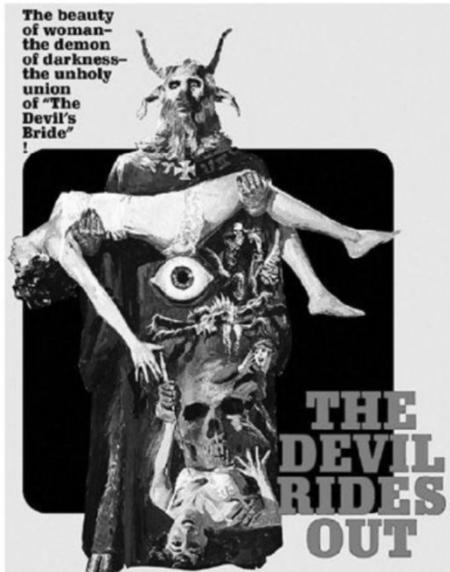
(\$29.97 Blu-ray each) 10/19

**THE DEVIL RIDES OUT (1968)**

★☆☆1/2

D: Terence Fisher. Christopher Lee, Charles Gray, Nike Arrighi, Leon Greene, Patrick Mower, Sarah Lawson, Paul Eddington, Rosalyn Landor. 95 mins.

This creepy Hammer horror is based on Dennis Wheatley's novel *The Devil Rides Out* but was known as *The Devil's Bride* in the USA. It's the American title that's seen in the opening credits of Scream Factory's new Blu-ray. *Devil* is noteworthy as one of the few Hammer horrors not to be set in the 19th century but during the 1920s. The film offered Lee a rare opportunity to play a hero. The star turns in a wonderfully strong performance as the Duc de Richleau, a character who appeared in a number of Wheatley novels published between 1933-1970. In *Devil*, the Duc is presented as an expert on black magic and takes it upon himself to rescue his young friend Simon (Mower) from the clutches of a Satanic cult Simon has joined. To that end, he enlists the aid of another friend, Rex (Greene, dubbed by Patrick Allen), along with his niece (Lawson) and her husband (Eddington). There are some nice scares sprinkled throughout. In one particularly frightening sequence, the Duc and Rex are searching Simon's deserted house when an anonymous demonic figure with intense, glaring eyes appears before them. "Don't look at the eyes!" shouts the Duc, but Rex doesn't heed the advice. They manage to escape, and Rex, who had been skeptical about the supernatural, is now a believer.



Another scene might disturb religious viewers. During one of the cult's ceremonial meetings, the Devil himself, a man with the head of a goat, puts in an appearance. The sequence shows that screenwriter Richard Matheson and auteur Fisher were serious about presenting black magic in all its evil glory. They weren't afraid to meet their subject head on. Gray offers scene-stealing work as Mocata, the head of the cult. Mocata doesn't have a lot of screen time, but his chilling presence is felt throughout. The power in Gray's performance lies in his hypnotic eyes—beware the stare that paralyzes! Gray is a superb character actor, best known as the criminologist in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) and for his roles in James Bond films. He makes for a most worthy opponent to Lee's heroic Duc.

Scream Factory offers a superb transfer of this spooktacular chestnut. As always, the company prepares a generous extras menu. There's a commentary track with a delightfully talkative Lee and Lawson, a making-of documentary which includes interviews with Matheson, and separately filmed interviews with film historians Jonathan Rigby and Kim Newman. There's also a short film which goes into the Wheatley adaptations produced by Hammer. An episode of the docu-series *The World of Hammer*, which delves into the history of some of the non-horror titles produced by the studio, is also included, as are theatrical trailers. Bravo!

**THE WITCHES (1966)** ★☆☆1/2

D: Cyril Frankel. Joan Fontaine, Kay Walsh, Alec McCowen, Ingrid Brett, Gwen Frangcon-Davies, Duncan Lamont, John Collin, Martin Stephens. 90 mins.

This Hammer suspense thriller about witches is sorely lacking in witchcraft, though the studio did score quite a coup in securing the services of Oscar-winning Hollywood legend Fontaine. According to a commentary track voiced by film historian Constantine Nasr and included on Scream Factory's new Blu-ray, it was Fontaine, whose star had begun to fall in Tinsel Town, who put the project together and brought it to Hammer as a starring vehicle for herself. The film was titled *The Witches* by Hammer but was known as *The Devil's Own* in the USA. On the Blu-ray, it's the British title that's seen in the opening credits, while the American title appears in the trailer and TV spots included on the extras menu.

La Fontaine plays Gwen Mayfield, a schoolteacher who suffered a nervous breakdown after witch doctors drove her out of the village where she was teaching in Africa. Now recovered, she accepts a position at a school in the small, picturesque English village of Hedaby. All seems well at first, until she notices a few strange things, such as a student (Stephens) being taken seriously ill; concurrent with his illness, Mayfield finds a headless doll with voodoo pins stuck into it. Eventually, she has a second



breakdown. As she begins to recover, she finds herself caught up with a group of witches run by Stephanie Bax (Walsh), who intends to sacrifice a 14-year-old student of Mayfield's, a sacrifice that will extend Bax's life.

The basic premise is good, but *The Witches* suffers from a lack of atmosphere; most of the film's settings are sunny, colorful and cheerful, too cheerful to create an environment of suspense. The film just isn't scary, though Fontaine and Walsh are quite good in their roles. There are also things in Nigel Kneale's script that don't quite make sense, such as why McCowen's character dresses in clericals even though he's not a priest—no real explanation is given for this. The film could also have used more scenes of witchcraft—it is called *The Witches* after all. It isn't until the very end that Mayfield realizes that she's up against a practitioner of witchcraft, and by then too much time has passed and the audience might not care.

The film did absolutely nothing for Fontaine's career. It proved to be her final feature, and she spent the rest of her life appearing on television. If *The Witches* was the actress's attempt to restart her career as a top-billed leading lady, it was a failure. More's the pity. Fontaine, in her late 40s when the film was shot, was still quite beautiful and could still command the screen.

In addition to the aforementioned extras, *The Witches* Blu-ray arrives with a documentary titled *Hammer Glamour*, which is also included on Scream Factory's disc of Hammer's *Frankenstein Created Woman*. *Glamour* is a delightfully fun puff piece about the various leading ladies who have graced Hammer productions over the years and includes interviews with some of the studio's most popular actresses.

## BLOODSUCKERS AMOK!

**LUST FOR A VAMPIRE** (1971) **88 1/2**  
D: Jimmy Sangster. Ralph Bates, Barbara Jefford, Suzanna Leigh, Michael Johnson, Helen Christie, Mike Raven, Yutte Stensgaard. 95 mins.

A film that began with enormous potential is marred by a dull script and the loss of two key personnel. When this sequel to Hammer's hit lesbian vampire chiller **The Vampire Lovers** was first conceived, Hammer auteur Terence Fisher, who helmed many of the studio's best films, was intended to direct, while superstar Peter Cushing was set to play the role ultimately inhabited by Bates. Fisher bowed out after suffering an accident, while Cushing had to leave the production due to his wife's illness. Though Sangster is a passable director, he lacks Fisher's flair, and Bates, a superb actor, was half Cushing's age, too young to be playing a role meant for a middle-aged man.

Set in Europe in 1830, **Lust** tells of the further adventures of the Karnsteins, the family of devil-worshiping vampires who were earlier seen in **The Vampire Lovers** and who first came to life in the pages of Sheridan Le Fanu's novella **Carmilla**. This time out the now bisexual Carmilla (stunningly beautiful Stensgaard), going by the name Mircalla, takes up residence at a finishing school where teachers Bates and Johnson, as well as one of her female classmates, promptly fall in love with her. Shots of bare breasts abound as Mircalla kills the classmate and Bates but returns Johnson's affections. The movie has one of the most cringe-inducing scenes ever seen in a Hammer film. As Johnson and Stensgaard make love in a fogbound cemetery, an embarrassing pop song called "Strange Love" is heard on the soundtrack. It's an awful song, completely out of place given the film's Gothic 19<sup>th</sup>-century setting, and nearly ruins the film.

Around 30 when the film was made, Bates looks a bit silly playing an obviously middle-aged man. Still, he does good work as the schoolmaster obsessed with the Karnsteins and the occult. Stensgaard, who continues to enjoy an enormous cult following, is far from a great actress but gives an acceptable performance as the sensual Carmilla/Mircalla. **Lust** is noted as the debut of Raven, an actor who set out to be a horror star but whose career fizzled after a mere four appearances. His role here is small, but he has a good scene at the beginning, conducting the Satanic ritual which brings the long-dead Carmilla/Mircalla back to life—his voice was dubbed by actor Valentine Dyall. There are several tight close-ups that are supposed to be of Raven's bloodshot eyes that are actually

shots of Christopher Lee—and though the two actors bear a slight resemblance, doing this was a bad idea: The shots of Lee's eyes do not match Raven's face. **Lust** suffers from a lack of atmosphere and scares. Most of it unfolds in bright daylight, with even some nighttime scenes shot "day for night," i.e., lensed during the day with a filter over the camera to give the appearance of night. The cheerful, sunny settings fail to create the atmosphere of fear and dread needed for a story like this to work, though the castle and cemetery sets do weave a bit of a mood.

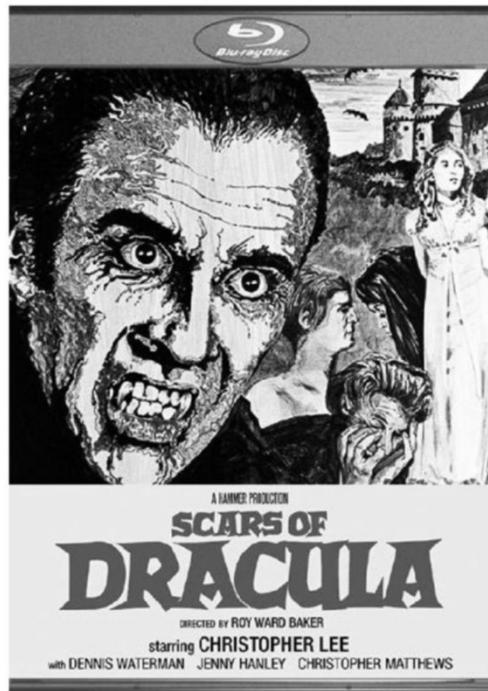
As with its other recent Hammer titles, Scream Factory offers a superb print. The disc includes the film's somewhat campy theatrical trailer ("Welcome to the finishing school where they really do finish you!") and a lovely commentary track with Sangster and Leigh (who plays one of the teachers). This track was originally recorded for the film's DVD release some years back and now takes on a poignancy as both have since passed on. Film historian Bruce Hallenbeck talks about the film quite extensively in a newly recorded commentary, and actress Mel Churcher, who played one of the schoolgirls, sits for a short on-camera interview.

### **SCARS OF DRACULA** (1970) **88**

D: Roy Ward Baker. Christopher Lee, Dennis Waterman, Jenny Hanley, Christopher Matthews, Patrick Troughton, Michael Gwynn, Michael Ripper, Wendy Hamilton, Anouska Hempel. 95 mins.

This latter-day Hammer horror has a less than stellar reputation. With Scream Factory now giving the film a deluxe Blu-ray release, it might be time to reassess this chiller. Except for a poor opening which completely ignores the continuity of **Taste the Blood of Dracula**, the previous film in the series, **Scars** isn't a bad movie at all. The action kicks off in Castle Dracula, where a bat flies over a stone slab, spitting up blood onto the Count's ashes. This brings the immortal vampire back to life. What the film doesn't explain is how the ashes ended up in the castle, since in **Taste** the Count had met his demise in Victorian London. And just where did that fake-looking bat come from? The basic plot is simple. Young Lothario Paul (Matthews), on the run from the police, accidentally winds up in Castle Dracula as a guest of the Count. He makes love to the Count's lady friend Tania (Hempel), who is soon inexplicably killed by the Count. Paul's brother Simon (Waterman) and Sarah (Hanley), a young woman who loves them both, follow Paul to the castle, where Dracula sets his sights on Sarah. Will Simon and Sarah find out what happened to Paul? Will they escape with their lives?

**Scars** was produced during a low point in Hammer's history as the company had lost the financial backing and distribution deals it had enjoyed with major Hollywood studios like Warner Brothers. Financing now came from EMI, a small company that could only afford a budget of



200,000 pounds. The film was produced quickly and cheaply, so it doesn't quite have the sumptuous look of earlier Hammer productions. What **Scars** does have is the always wonderful Lee, who herein is given considerably more dialogue than in any of the other Hammer Draculas. The larger-than-life Lee gives his all and once again makes for a scary and erotic vampire. He receives able support from a fine cast, especially Troughton as Klove, Dracula's sometimes-but-not-always faithful servant. Gwynn is quite good as a kindly priest who meets a gruesome demise at the hands of that bat. And it's always nice to see Hammer stalwart Ripper, who offers another enjoyable performance as an innkeeper who has lived in fear ever since his beloved wife died, also after an attack by Dracula's friend, the bat. The castle set, which bears no resemblance to the one seen in earlier films in the series, is nonetheless a creepy fogbound setting, just the sort of place where you'd expect to see supernatural creatures. The whole film is in fact chockfull of atmosphere. While certainly not in the same league as classics like 1958's **Horror of Dracula** (VS #33) or above-average entries like 1965's **Dracula, Prince of Darkness** (VS #24), **Scars** is still fun, offering solid suspense, a couple of good scares, and some disturbing gore, though that senseless opening and the silly-looking bat do bring things down a notch.

Scream Factory delivers a superb print with sharp colors and crisp sound. Extras include the trailer plus a making-of documentary in which leading lady Hanley shares her memories. There are two commentary tracks, one where the now-departed Lee and director Baker share their own memories, and another featuring film historian Constantine Nasr, who doesn't care for the film. Whether you love the film or hate it, Nasr knows a great deal about **Scars**' history and presents keen insight into its production.

## THE LEGEND OF THE 7 GOLDEN VAMPIRES (1973)

D: Roy Ward Baker. Peter Cushing, David Chiang, Julie Ege, Robin Stewart, Shih Szu, John Forbes Robertson. 89 mins.

Hammer was in trouble when this kung-fu/Dracula hybrid was produced in 1973. The studio's old-school brand of Gothic horror, which once guaranteed box-office success, could no longer compete with the more graphic fear fare coming out of the USA, like Wes Craven's 1972 **Last House on the Left** (VS #97) or William Friedkin's 1973 **The Exorcist** (VS #28). Some new blood was needed, and so studio head Michael Carreras concocted the idea of mashing up the studio's horror output with other popular genres of the day. He found a willing partner in Run Run Shaw, the Hong Kong-based movie mogul who was raking in the bucks with his kung-fu films. The result was **The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires**.

Cushing heads the cast as the vampire hunter Van Helsing, though he's not playing the same Van Helsing he portrayed in earlier films such as **Horror of Dracula** (1958) or **Brides of Dracula** (1960). **Legend** appears to be a self-contained story, not a sequel to any other films produced by Hammer. Christopher Lee, who had long threatened to stop playing Dracula, finally made good on his word and refused to take the role he had played eight times previous. He was replaced by Robertson, who bears a slight resemblance to Lee and made for a commanding figure, though it's difficult to properly gauge his performance as his voice was dubbed by David de Keyser. And though he's an imposing actor, Robertson's thick red lipstick is somewhat comical looking, making him a less than frightening vampire.

The plot is simple. Van Helsing and his son (Stewart) are traveling on foot to a small Chinese village, where they hope to eradicate

a cult of vampires. They're being accompanied by seven brothers and one sister, all kung-fu masters, who are from the town. Along the way, they encounter the vampires several times and engage in some serious kung-fu fighting with the undead. Stunningly beautiful Ege plays a wealthy European widow who's fascinated by Van Helsing's work and agrees to finance the trip on condition that she gets to go along.

Shot in Hong Kong and the surrounding countryside, the movie looks considerably different than the average Hammer film. The kung-fu sequences are well staged and should please fans of that genre, and scenes of the vampires rising out of their graves are appropriately creepy. Cushing is, as always, superb, giving a strong performance as the vampire hunter who's determined to bring down his prey. Chinese actor Chiang, who plays the brother who first approaches Van Helsing, gives a good performance in possibly his only English-language role. Chiang was a casting coup for Hammer, as the actor is quite a superstar in his native country, having appeared in over 130 films and dozens of TV shows. In 2004 he was inducted into the Avenue of the Stars, Hong Kong's version of Hollywood's Walk of Fame.

**Legend** is not Hammer at its best, but it's still a fun, fast-paced film, definitely something a little different. Extras on Scream Factory's Blu-ray include an interview with Chiang conducted in a Chinese dialect with subtitles. Film historian Bruce Hallenbeck offers a lively commentary in which he discusses, among other things, how the film came together and some of the problems that arose during filming. There are theatrical trailers, as well as the bonus feature **The 7 Brothers Meet Dracula**, the heavily edited U.S. release cut. **Golden Vampires** is the unedited director's cut and the superior version.

## THE REPTILE (1966) 1/2

D: John Gilling. Noel Willman, Jennifer Daniel, Ray Barrett, Jacqueline Pearce, Michael Ripper. 90 mins.

This superior Hammer chiller is chockfull of atmosphere and offers up a couple of nice scares. Shot back-to-back with Hammer's **Plague of the Zombies** (VS #110), the two films share many of the same sets and two supporting players, Ripper and Pearce. **The Reptile** is a real treat for Ripper fans: the Hammer regular had one of his largest roles for the studio in this film.

Barrett and Daniel play a married couple who move to a Cornish village plagued by a series of mysterious deaths. Once ensconced in their new home, they meet their cruel and creepy neighbor (Willman), who harbors a dark secret: his daughter (Pearce) was cursed by a Maylay snake cult and now periodically transforms into a snake/woman hybrid. When she's in this form, her only instinct is to kill, which she does by biting her victims on the neck like a vampire.



The snake-biting scenes are scary and disturbing. Roy Ashton's serpent makeup is most effective, giving Pearce scaly skin, bug eyes, and a pair of sharp fangs. It's jarring when she jumps out of the shadows and pounces on her victims, all of whom turn black while foaming at the mouth. Pearce offers a marvelous performance out of makeup as a young woman who comes to a bad end through no fault of her own. Willman is superb as her dad, whose cruelty towards his daughter and coldness towards everyone else is a mask for the terror he lives with every day.

Ripper is, of course, a wonderful actor. He plays the kindly pub owner who becomes a hero of sorts, befriending Barrett and Daniel and helping them solve the mystery regarding the village's strange deaths. One scene featuring Ripper and Barrett is particularly macabre: the two men dig up a few bodies—one of whom is Barrett's brother—in the local graveyard to examine them as they try to unravel the mystery. The graveyard set, recognizable as the same one used in **Plague of the Zombies**, is wonderfully spooky. You gotta admire these guys for having the courage to go there in the middle of the night to dig up those corpses! As with most of Hammer's period pieces, **The Reptile** is elegantly appointed, featuring lush sets and lovely 19th century costumes. The film is definitely worthy of your time if you're a fan of old-fashioned Gothic horror.

Scream Factory's extras menu offers a making-of documentary, an interview with 1<sup>st</sup> assistant director William P. Cartlidge, a commentary track with film historians Steve Haberman, Ted Newsom and Constantine Nasr, theatrical trailers, which include the double feature trailer for **The Reptile** and **Rasputin, The Mad Monk**, TV spots, and the **Wicked Women** episode of the **World of Hammer** docu-series. 

## MORE BRIT HORROR HITS!

### KINO LORBER

(\$29.95 Blu-ray) 10/19

AND SOON THE DARKNESS (1970)

8881/2

D: Robert Fuest. Pamela Franklin, Michelle Dotrice, Sandor Eles, John Nettleton, Clare Kelly, Hana Maria Pravda, Claude Bertrand. 99 mins.

Prolific Brit scripter Brian (**Captain Kronos, Vampire Hunter, Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde**) Clemens crafts another genre gem with this nerve-fraying suspenser. 19-year-old Pamela Franklin, nearly a decade distant from her memorable debut as Flora in Jack Clayton's Henry James-based classic **The Innocents** (VS #94), is spot-on as Jane, a young British nurse enjoying a cycling holiday in rural France with her co-worker Cathy (Dotrice). Cinematographer Ian Wilson captures the spare summer beauty of the remote region even as the two friends experience an abrupt falling-out over conflicting agendas: Michelle wants to stop to smell the metaphorical roses while Jane is set on riding on through. Once the bickering besties break up, Cathy goes missing, leaving a desperate Jane stranded in a strange land where help seems at a premium. Clemens and co-writer Terry (**The House in Nightmare Park**) Nation assemble a slew of suspects, including Paul (Eles), a Parisian policeman spending his vacation investigating a similar disappearance and subsequent murder that transpired three years earlier, along with locals like farmer Lassal (Bertrand) and the village gendarme (Nettleton). Franklin convincingly conveys a combo of panic and pluck as the endangered but determined tourist stuck in the unfriendliest burg this side of John Sturges' Black Rock, while Eles keeps viewers guessing as the sometimes cryptic Paul. Despite its rather generic title, **And Soon the Darkness** can take its rightful place among such missing-person winners as Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu's original **The Vanishing** (still the most chilling of them all), Jonathan Mostow's **Breakdown** (VS #24), Otto Preminger's **Bunny Lake Is Missing** (VS #54), and Denis Villeneuve's 2013 **Prisoners** (VS #90), among others. The property was far less successfully remade by Marcos Elfron in 2010, with American visitors Amber Heard and Odette Annable adrift in Argentina. Extras on Kino's visually vibrant Blu-ray include an archival audio commentary with director Fuest and writer Clemens, a new commentary by film historian Troy Howarth, radio spots, and the original theatrical trailer.

—The Phantom

### WARREN WEIRDNESS!

#### VINEGAR SYNDROME

(\$32.98 Blu-ray + DVD each) 10/19  
BLOODY NEW YEAR (1987)

881/2

D: Norman J. Warren. Suzy Aitchison, Nikki Brooks, Daniel James, Mark Powley, Catherine Roman, Julian Ronnie. 94 mins.

Five friends spend a lazy summer day swimming, then head to a nearby fun fair for some junk food and thrill rides. They pick up a sixth who comes along after a trio of over-aged '50s greasers start hassling them. They get away on a boat, but the boat springs a leak. They barely make it to an island, where they find a seemingly abandoned resort still decorated for a New Year's party from 1959. Things quickly go from weird to really weird with 30-year-old news reports popping up on the telly and apparitions making the scene. When the kids find a screening room, images from that fateful New Year's Eve are shown and a creeper jumps out of the screen to terrorize them. The resort goes trippy and once the kids die they come back as demon-things that must be dismembered to be slowed down. The three thugs are back and the surviving kids learn there was a plane carrying a time-altering device that crash-landed on the island and put everyone from the party in an eternal time loop.

This one is all over the place! It's like a mash-up of **The Evil Dead**, **Nightmare on Elm Street** and **Phantasm**. You can never get ahead of this flick and guess what is going to happen next. With that said, getting through this one, even at 94 minutes, makes you think you're stuck in a time loop of your own at times. **Fiend Without a Face** makes a cameo appearance. Fans will recognize overgrown thug Steve Emerson from his last theatrical performance as Jon, the owner of the Winchester Pub in Edgar Wright's **Shaun of the Dead** (VS #54). The Blu-ray was sourced from a rare 35mm print, as the negative no longer exists. Warren offers a running commentary to accompany what turned out to be his final feature, one as bizarre as anything else in his filmography.

#### SATAN'S SLAVE (1976) 881/2

D: Norman J. Warren. Michael Gough, Martin Potter, Candace Glendenning, Barbara Kellerman, Michael Craze, Monica Ringwald. 90 mins.

Catherine Yorke (Glendenning) travels with her parents to her Uncle Alexander's (Gough) secluded country manse. On the way, her parents are killed in a freak accident and she is left in the care of her uncle. Her creepy (and, unknown to her, murderous) cousin Stephen (Potter) starts putting the moves on her until she finally falls in



love with him (what?!). Catherine suffers continual hallucinations of red-cloaked figures and witchcraft. Uncle's assistant Frances (Kellerman) plays along but finally comes clean and tells Catherine she's in danger. Seems uncle is a necromancer intent on raising the spirit of Camilla Yorke (Ringwald), a powerful witch killed centuries earlier. This is a fairly effective Satan-cult flick that wallows in buckets of gratuitous sleaze and gore. Gough is obviously enjoying his role as the lead creeper and absolutely rocks a magnificent '70s moustache while he does it. Writer David McGillivray did **Terror** (1978) next for Warren and worked on a number of scripts for fellow Brit scare merchant Pete Walker, including **Schizo** (1976) and 1974's **Frightmare** (VS #91), among others. This is the full-on 90-minute version, with all the nasty bits of flesh and blood on display. Vinegar Syndrome delivers the 2k restoration with a plethora of extras, including multiple commentaries, new and archival featurettes, interview with composer John Scott, trailers, deleted scenes and more. 8

—Rob Freese

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**VideoScope!**

See page 4 for details.

# Rob Freese's RETROSCOPE! NEAR-MISSES OF THE 1990s

JUST OVER 25 YEARS AGO, the first writing assignment I ever landed was for *Femme Fatales* magazine. Entitled *Produced but Abandoned*, it consisted of me cold-calling various filmmakers and actresses to ask them about movies they had been connected with that were announced but never got made or, worse, were never completed or distributed. These were people whose movies I had been watching for years, and the chance to talk one-on-one with them was too awesome an opportunity to pass up.

The talks were conducted between 1993 and 1994. It was a different era. Independent films were still finding release on VHS and Laserdisc, as well as on cable and pay channels, but they weren't meeting with the same financial rewards they'd reaped just a few years earlier. Audience tastes were changing, and when a little B horror or sci-fi flick shared New Release shelf space at the local video shop with the major Hollywood titles, renters expected the same zillion-dollar shine from a Fred Olen Ray movie that they got from a James Cameron movie. When I recently read through my notes from this long-ago project, I saw the beginning of where the business of B movies was headed. The days of gathering a small group of friends and cobbling a film together in 10 days, shooting on 35mm short ends without permits and scoring a quick sale to cable or a VHS outfit were sadly drawing to a close.

The participants include prolific B filmmakers Fred Olen Ray and Jim Wynorski, actress/writer Brinke Stevens, and actress/fan fave Michelle Bauer. They paint a picture of a bygone era of B filmmaking. The biggest change since is the introduction of the internet, which has helped erode a market once filled by exploitation films. With constant access to never-ending video streaming everything from people behaving badly to social commentary, news, pornography and cat antics, the need for "exploitation" is filled every second of the day in the comfort of one's home.

## Fred Olen Ray

"At times there is a spur-of-the-moment enthusiasm for a project and we're hot to do it, but then the realities hit and the film cannot be done for various reasons. Sometimes we'll be shooting on sets we finished using and end up shooting scenes for another movie

we'll shoot later. On the set of **Biohazard** we made up scenes that ended up in **Prison Ship 2005**, which was later released as **Star Slammer**. And on the set of **Star Slammer** we shot scenes of Forry Ackerman and Bobbie Bresee as mad scientists for a feature that never got finished called **Beach Blanket Bloodbath**. On standing sets I have to get some extra footage if the extra time, money and facilities are there. **Alien Within** was shot and made around scenes from **Evil Spawn**. We shot **Biohazard** on some of the New World sets, which is obvious in the picture. And on those sets we also shot scenes that later became **Star Slammer**."

On **Beyond Fear**: "Sometimes we shoot scenes and then go back and say, 'Okay, can we take these scenes with Aldo Ray and make a movie that people will want to see and we can get our money back? Or should we go to another project?' If Aldo Ray's name isn't worth much, in terms of box-office draw or video rentals and sales, then most of the time we'll go on to another project. **[Beyond Fear]** was an intended remake of **The Indestructible Man** with Aldo Ray as the death-row inmate" [originally played by Lon Chaney Jr.].

**Asylum of Horrors**: "[It] was a proposed anthology and a wraparound was shot using Cameron Mitchell. The movie was never shot, but some scenes were used in a film released overseas called **Demon Cop**. Due to rights concerning the scenes, they were deleted for American distribution, which never happened."

**Frankenstein's Brain**: "Scenes were shot with John Carradine, including some dubbing, but the picture never got made. Some scenes were used in an altered form in **Evil Spawn**." (The story concerned Frankenstein's daughter preserving her father's brain in a jar, with Carradine's voice being used for the commands the brain gives.)

**Passion Pits**: "**Passion Pits** was my version of Woody Allen's **Radio Days**, but about the drive-in. We wanted to do the film while there were a few still standing. Later it became **Bikini Drive-in**, which is basically a version of **Passion Pits** with the same sentiments."

**Student Chainsaw Nurses and Scalps 2—The Return of J.D.**: "Sometimes at the end of a movie we will mention, or 'threaten,' a sequel as a joke but have no real intentions of releasing one."

## Brinke Stevens

**The Coven**: "We were at a convention in Baltimore. Fred had a Bolex with him, so we drove to Salem and filmed about ten minutes of me running around a cemetery, hands coming up out of the ground and some stuff around the lake. It was



going to be used as a flashback for my character, who was a teacher at an exclusive girls school. She is recruiting new girls to be in a modern-day coven."

**Lady Vengeance**: "Monique Gabrielle and I played sister CIA agents exploring the death of their CIA agent father, played by Stuart Whitman. It was going to be shot down in Orlando, and I saw it as my 'breakthrough' picture. It was the first time I requested more money, rather than scale, because I thought my name was growing, and the producers agreed. The picture was kind of like the movies Andy Sidaris makes, so I don't know why it didn't get made."

**Unnamable II**: "I had worked with Jean-Paul Ouellette on a movie called **Chinatown Connection**. Then he started doing the **Unnamable** movies. Our deal was that I'd help on the script rewrites on **Part 2** in exchange for a part. The deal basically got screwed and I was out of the picture after auditioning. They didn't think I was the right build for the cop part."

**Video Pirates from Mars** (aka **Mars Still Needs Women**): "I was to play Evila in the sci-fi comedy. Bobbie Bresee was also in the cast. We had several rehearsals and posters and T-shirts printed up, but no one wanted to invest in it. Some money was put up but never enough. After the economy dive in '92, people who had \$100,000 suddenly didn't want to invest in B films and went into television instead. Back in the late '80s I was constantly working, but it all died in the early '90s."

**Syngenor II:** "It [would have] starred me and Don 'The Dragon' Wilson. I play a scientist that comes to do experiments on prisoners, but then the Syngeners break loose and we have to get the prisoners out. The movie would have been fast-moving and haunting, like the first **Alien** movie. And it had plenty of monsters. The screenwriter didn't like me. He wanted a blonde. The script was collateral for the loan the screenwriter owed his brother. When he couldn't pay back the loan, his brother claimed that he owned the script and wouldn't let us shoot it. At that point the producer backed out and said to call him when they were serious about making it."

**Don't Look Back:** "John Stinson brought me a script called **Don't Look Back** about stolen artwork. I was cast as a Romanian art expert brought in to help on the case with Cliff De Young, with whom my character was having an affair. They talked to Timothy Dalton about playing the bad guy, but he passed when he got the part as the new James Bond. Then they talked to Gene Simmons of KISS. I went so far as to learn the Romanian language from some 'Learn to Speak' tapes a fan passed on to me when I got the part. I knew one of the cameramen from high school. We were planning a documentary on a search for Dracula's tomb while we were in Romania but we never got to do it. I got my passport but I never left. The Romanian money fell through, as did the production at that point. I think it was part of a money-smuggling operation, taking money out of Romania and putting it into a production, then releasing the film and bringing American money into the country."



### Michelle Bauer

**On Terror Nights:** "It was shot in the Errol Flynn mansion in the Hollywood Hills. I have no idea as to its current whereabouts, but it is finished and has been screened. I'm happy with my part in the film. I got to play a tough biker chick and have wild sex with my [onscreen] boyfriend and that was fun."

**Little Devils:** "When Fred [Olen Ray] did **Little Devils**, it wasn't a good time to put it out. It's a very good movie with Jay Richardson, and Robert Vaughn playing the Devil. I think we shot it in the same house Fred shot in for his movie **The Haunting Fear**."

### Jim Wynorski

**On Orville in Orbit:** "It was just a joke I added at the end of **Hard to Die**, but someone actually wrote a script for it. It was pretty good, too. Orville is in a life pod, floating around space with the last soul box and dreaming. In his dreams he sees himself as a little boy, wearing, of course, his Orville-issue flannel shirt and meeting Hockstatter as a kid. It goes on to tell how Hockstatter was into black magic and how he gave Orville the power of indestructability. From there the story goes to the life pod crash-landing on a planet populated entirely by women. They release Orville and open the soul box, inadvertently releasing the malevolent spirit of Hockstatter. After that it's the same exact plot as the other two Orville Ketchum movies, only with ray guns. I have no real intention of actually making **Orville in Orbit**. I do these films for fun. They're done on ten- or twelve-day shooting schedules and I see them as larks, as tests, almost, to see if I can still shoot a film on that kind of time and money. **Sorority House Massacre 2** was shot only because the sets for **Slumber Party Massacre 3** were still standing and we were able to use them for Orville Ketchum. I've done his movie twice now. I don't want to do it a third."

**Prison Planet:** "**Prison Planet** was my version of **Chained Heat** in space. I wanted to have some of the same cast from **Heat** and had Sybil Danning in mind from the start. The plot was basically **Alien 3** with chicks. The script was completed and poster art was commissioned to help promote financial interest at film festivals. Unfortunately, the film never got into the production stages. Eventually, the backers took a pass because it would have been too expensive. Maybe it was a little too ambitious. It would have had a lot of big special effects and action. It would have been a fun film to make."

### Update

Some of the films and scenes mentioned here have since found release of some sort. Some were eventually issued under different titles but some are still missing, never finished or even



started. **Terror Nights** was released on DVD by Fred Olen Ray's RetroMedia label under the title **Bloody Movie**. **Little Devils** was released on RetroMedia as **Witchcraft Academy**. Steve Latshaw's **Jack-O** (1995) ended up being the final resting place for many of Fred's unproduced movies. On the **Jack-O** commentary, Fred mentions the footage featuring Cameron Mitchell as the host of **Dr. Cadaver's Monster Movie Madness** show on TV came from scenes of Mitchell from an unfinished movie called **Terminal Shock**. I wondered if **Asylum of Horrors** was the same film as **Terminal Shock** and recently asked Fred about it. He responded, "[It is] possible. It was a long time ago." A snafu on set wasn't caught until three in the afternoon when Cameron was basically finished shooting his scenes with actor Michael Sonye. Fred continues, "We had a 400 ft. roll of VNF in the fridge and quickly loaded it and shot what were basically just bumpers that were never used, so we cycled them into **Jack-O**. They never appeared anywhere else."

**The Coven** shows up as a movie clip on **Dr. Cadaver's Monster Movie Madness** show. The voice-over audio that Fred had recorded of John Carradine for **Frankenstein's Brain** was incorporated into the character he portrayed in **Jack-O**. The actual footage of John Carradine used for a flashback in **Jack-O** was for an unfinished film called **Cannibal Church**. The footage Dawn Wildsmith appears in was shot as a promotional trailer for **Teenage Exorcist**. (This was not the version that was eventually made.) Director Dan Golden is also in this footage wearing a mask from **Biohazard**. The footage shot of Aldo Ray for **Beyond Fear** has yet to be recycled into a feature, but the scenes appear as bonus content on the **Biohazard** Blu-ray. ♀

## SPLIT SCREEN

Axes and Picks with VS Crix  
Tim Ferrante & Scott Voisin

In this supernatural *Split Screen* installment, our dueling crix debate the merits of Richard Donner's mainstream shocker *The Omen* and John Moore's slavish revamp lensed some four decades on.

**Scott Voisin:** Following in the unholy footsteps of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Exorcist* (1973), 1976's *The Omen* tells the story of U.S. Ambassador Robert Thorn (Gregory Peck) and his wife Katherine (Lee Remick) as they welcome the addition of their newborn son, Damien. All is fine with the idyllic family until the child's fifth birthday triggers a series of grisly and mysterious deaths that suggests Damien may be the anti-Christ. The original, written by David Seltzer and directed by Richard Donner, is a solid if imperfect thriller. It does a lot of things right but could've done a few things better. I doubt the world was screaming for a remake, but if there had to be one, this was a prime opportunity to make improvements and reintroduce the story to a new generation. So what does the studio do? It uses Seltzer's 30-old script and films it word-for-word, page-by-page. In fact, Seltzer received sole credit for the screenplay even though he wasn't involved with the production! Not since Gus Van Sant's insulting shot-for-shot redo of *Psycho* has a remake been so crass, lazy and utterly pointless.

**Tim Ferrante:** Not to tarnish your uncommonly lucid opener, but saying that John Moore's 2006 remake is a "word-for-word, page-by-page" lift suggests there's nothing new or different. That aside, when Donner's original was released, it was burned into my skull. I worked in theatres and saw/heard it nightly for weeks. A big hit on every level, but I thought it boring. Children as threats rarely spook me, unless it's Regan MacNeil. As you said, the remake blew an opportunity by wallowing in that same script but it does have some interesting mods. Even so, when stacked against the original, it's stunningly unremarkable. And Julia Stiles as Katherine? *Ouch!* Although, comparing her to Lee Remick's skilled, no-contest perf is a bit unfair. Visually, Moore's passion for tracking and/or track and zoom shots and arc shots with every fourth or fifth camera cut is exhausting, relying on the techniques to the point of "again?!" Suffice it to say, I have renewed respect for Donner's "boring" version.

**SV:** All right, Tim, perhaps I was exaggerating a little bit. Allow me to clarify: 99% of the remake is regurgitated verbatim from the original script, while the "new" 1% is just duplicate material reworked with a slightly



different approach. End result: It's *exactly* the same movie! The same characters live, the same characters die, and the story arc moves from beginning to middle to end completely unaltered. I understand the concept of mounting productions from old stories with different actors breathing new life into time-worn tales, but this ain't Shakespeare. *The Omen* is a B-level horror movie whose premise is ripe with possibilities, and simply substituting Liev Schreiber and Julia Stiles for Peck and Remick isn't an upgrade. The only benefit of this remake is the stunt casting of Mia Farrow as the family nanny. For those who haven't seen *Rosemary's Baby*, the joke will go unacknowledged, but for those who have, it's a rare instance where this misguided reboot actually did something right. I only wish the filmmakers had been as equally inventive with the rest of the movie.

**TF:** Agree with you re: the Farrow casting. Two other actors whose casting is of personal interest were David Thewlis—here playing Keith Jennings, the photojournalist role originated by David Warner—who never disappoints in any part or genre in which he appears. Giovanni Lombardo Radice—whose fevered performance in *Cannibal Ferox* [1981] is unforgettable—portrays Father Spileto. I'd been captivated by them decades ago and remain a fan. Speaking of Spileto, the original film depicts plausible makeup effects of the character's injuries from a fire. The remake ratchets up the same injury scars by creating a laughable modern-day version of Gary Conway's mask in *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957). It's clearly a shock value makeup decision rather than one that would appear believable. And lest we forget, a nod to the cameo appearance of Harvey Stephens, the original Damien Thorn! His one-line close-up and prominent placing in a couple of subsequent camera cuts (even to the extent of a continuity error) is a fun Easter egg of sorts.

**SV:** Well, at least *you* had some fun watching this dumpster fire. For anyone curious about film-

making who wants to know where the line is drawn between art and business, look no further. The only reason this remake exists is because the studio wanted to take advantage of a once-in-our-lifetime release date of June 6, 2006 (6-6-06, get it?). Kudos to them for coming up with a devilishly clever marketing gimmick, but the movie itself was clearly the least of their concerns, seeing as how they delivered a half-assed, creatively bankrupt product designed solely to cash in on the original's name recognition. Sadly, people took the bait, and the flick grossed over \$119 million worldwide. With a budget of only \$25 million, even notoriously sketchy Hollywood accounting couldn't disguise the fact this thing turned a profit, which just further encourages executives to mine their vaults for any previously successful intellectual property that can be recycled for the masses. As long as audiences willingly pay good money to see mediocre crap like *The Omen*, we're all guaranteed a special place in cinema Hell.

**TF:** The remake just earned another \$3.99. That's how much I had to pay in order to stream it on Amazon Prime. I mentioned earlier how I thought the original was boring. Part of that was due to Gregory Peck. I never warmed to his acting style, but he's very likable and that's 90% of the game. A Peck horror movie made no sense, yet after watching him again decades later I thought he was terrific! In particular, the cemetery scene where he and Warner discover the shocking truth behind Damien's mother and his own "stillborn" son. The swarm of attacking hellhounds is *waaaay* over the top and leaves you breathless. Neither could have possibly survived, but it all works through clever cutting and Jerry Goldsmith's Oscar-winning underscore. The remake's unsuccessful handling sided on credibility by using just a few hounds and tempering other aspects of it. Yes, the 2006 carbon copy was needless. Although, I did admire its updated ghastly send-off of Keith Jennings. The Rube Goldberg-inspired bloodletting is heads above the 1976 original. ♀

## Rob Freese's SLASH-O-RAMA!

### GETTING ICED

ARROW VIDEO

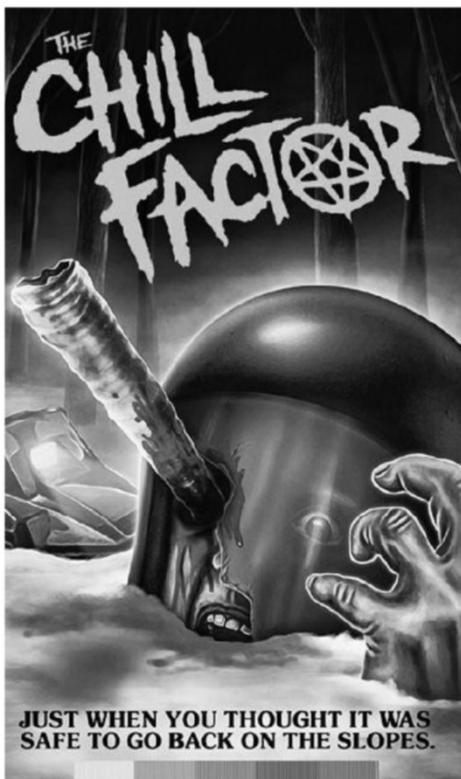
(\$39.95 each) 7/19, 6/19

#### THE CHILL FACTOR (1993) **88**

D: Christopher Webster. Dawn Laurrie, Aaron Kjenaas, Connie Snyder, Dave Fields, Eve Montgomery, Jim Cagle. 86 mins.

Six friends on a snowmobile adventure weekend drink a ton of beer, then decide to do some snowmobile racing in a storm. It's all fun and games until Tom (Kjenaas) is accidentally flung off his ski and face-plants into a nearby tree. They are 30 miles from civilization, they just noticed the storm, and Tom can't be moved now since he's basically a bloody bag of broken bones and raw meat. Ron (Cagle) scouts the area and finds the abandoned Camp Saint Dominic, which may have been the scene of a decades-earlier murder spree as well as some satanic cult activities. They get Tom wrapped up by the fire, then the kids start poking around the camp until they find what one character identifies as a "Devil's Eye," a sort of Haitian ouija board that works more like a wheel of (mis)fortune. Jeannie (Laurrie) doesn't want to play around with it, but her stupid friends convince her to be an idiot like them and they start speaking to the dead. Sure enough, a demon awakens and possesses Tom, who suddenly has a miraculous recovery and engages in some hot naked fun time with

Jeannie between killing their friends. It's a race to get away from Demonic Tom. Who will survive? Honestly, who cares? This slasher/possession movie is as dumb as its characters. The actual locale of the abandoned camp is pretty cool, but none of the sketchy backstory about the deaths or the supposed satanist connection or even who the demon is that possesses Tom leads to anything interesting. I just sort of looked at it for 86 minutes because there wasn't anything else to look at and I was too lazy to put anything else in the player. The whole story is told as a narrated flashback. This is odd because the character telling the story shouldn't know half the stuff she's talking about, as her character slept through most of the movie. There's a really greasy, nasty relationship between the brother and sister characters of Tom and Karen (Snyder), suggesting that they share a connection much closer than that of any normal brother and sister. As far as the gory goods go, the flick has a couple decent moments of blood spillage that any '80s horror hound will enjoy and really shines in the stunts department, with the initial snowmobile accident and a final fire gag that isn't done too often these days. It was originally released by AIP on VHS under the title **Demon Possessed**. Extras include commentary, copious interviews with various crew members, still gallery, **Demon Possessed** VHS trailer and VHS workprint copy. Arrow should be commended for another great release, but I wonder why such a dumb movie is given such lavish treatment when way better dumb movies like **House of Death**, **Iced** and **Fatal Games** have yet to be given any kind of legit digital premiere.



#### TRAPPED ALIVE (1988) **88 1/2**

D: Leszek Burzynski. Cameron Mitchell, Sullivan Hester, Laura Kallison, Mark Witsken, Alex Kubik, Elizabeth Kent, Randy Powell. 91 mins.

Robin (Hester) and Monica (Kallison) leave Robin's father's (Mitchell) Christmas party to trek out into the wintry wilds for a more happening holiday bash on the outskirts of town. Their merriment ceases when they are taken hostage after encountering a trio of escaped convicts led by the scarred-up Louis "Face" Napoleon (Kubik). Robin falls for young Randy Carter (Witsken), who Face forced to come along against his will, so he could drive them out of state. The only thing Randy succeeds in doing is uncontrollably sliding Monica's car out of control and stopping on top of a rickety entrance to the long-shuttered Forever Mine, which the car crashes through, dropping everyone deep into the mine. After the vehicle explodes, they have no choice but to go through the mine in search of another way out. It doesn't take long for them to realize there is someone, or something, in the mine with them, hunting and eating them one by one. Dumb deputy Billy Williams (Powell)



tracks the cons to the mine and encounters lonely Rachel (Kent), a young woman who lives on the property whose family owns the Forever Mine. He gets caught up in some sweet spontaneous holiday nookie-making before following the cons and their hostages into the mine. There's some effective cat and mouse as the group is stalked, with one really good scare coming during the satisfying climax. I didn't go into this one with much in the way of expectations and I'm happy to admit I enjoyed it way more than I thought I would. **Trapped Alive** is a fun, albeit totally stupid, '80s slasher that delivers plenty of gratuitous skin and gore for the self-respecting slasher fan. Hester makes for a resourceful and feisty psycho-fighter, and Mitchell is a delight in his limited screen time. Kubik as the head goon is just the right amount of weaselly jerk, the perfect character to root for the killer to snuff out in some horrible fashion. The gore effects are well executed and a couple moments of grue will jolt the most staunch knife-kill flick fans among us. Most impressive is the cavern set design, all built within a studio. While it was made with the intention of scoring a theatrical release, **Trapped Alive** sat on the shelf for five years before going straight to video via the AIP VHS label in the early '90s. Extras include copious cast and crew interviews, an episode of **Upper Michigan Tonight** about the making of the film, a look at director Burzynski's earlier films, still gallery and more. It might not add any new ideas to the well-worn slash 'n' hack formula but **Trapped Alive** (aka **Forever Mine**) does deliver what it sets out to, mainly dumb fun. **88**

## FREESE FRAME

### MUMMY DEAREST

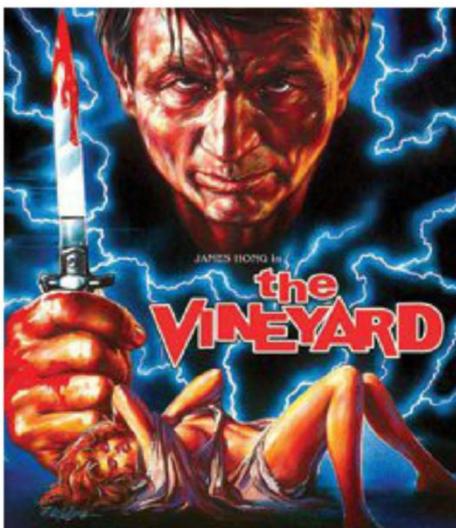
THE MUMMY'S REVENGE (1975)

★☆☆1/2

D: Carlos Aured. Paul Naschy, Jack Taylor, Maria Silva, Helga Line, Luis Davila, Rina Ottolina, Fernando Sanchez Polack. 89 mins. (Scorpion Releasing) 7/19

We meet the pharaoh Amenhotep (Naschy) while he's busy torturing concubines for kicks. His right-hand man Anchaff (Polack) rebels against the psychotic despot and poisons him, then terminates Amenhotep's sadistic lover Amana (Ottolina). Amenhotep is mummified and banished to a netherworld somewhere between the living and the dead, where he vows to return to get his vengeance. Many years later, Professor Nathan Stern (Taylor) leads a dig into Amenhotep's grave and brings everything, including the pharaoh's mummified remains, back to London. Egyptian Assad Bey (Naschy) is quick to share his two cents about removing Amenhotep's remains from Egypt. With his mistress Zanufer (Line), he plans on resurrecting the mummy and using it to destroy Stern and obtain eternal life. The first part of the plan is to sacrifice three virgins and feed their blood to Amenhotep, which awakens him, then sacrifice seven more to give the pharaoh eternal life. Stern and his gal pal Abigail (Silva) soon suspect Assad Bey of funny business. Amenhotep demands a female body to resurrect his lover Amana and finds Amana reincarnated in young Helen (Ottolina), a local doctor's daughter. Zanufer has a change of heart and tries to help Prof. Stern and Abigail escape when Assad Bey takes them prisoner. Soon it's the final showdown between the professor and mad mummy as an unconscious Helen lies on the sacrificial altar.

This is one heck of a great Naschy monster movie. The mummy here has more in common with Hammer's 1959 **The Mummy** reincarnation with Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing than it does with Universal's 1932 original with Boris Karloff. (Although with his build, he's more reminiscent of the barrel-chested Lon Chaney, Jr. mummy from **The Mummy's Curse** and **The Mummy's Hand** than the more svelte Chris Lee creature.) Naschy basically portrays three characters and all of them are evil dudes. Line gets a little more pathos here than she did when she played Naschy's maniacal main squeeze in 1973's **Horror Rises from the Tomb** (VS #53). Taylor appears as a straight, if somewhat bumbling, hero type, as opposed to the sketchy doctor he played in the previous Naschy outing **Dr. Jekyll and the Werewolf** (VS #91). Ottolina is allowed to briefly get



down and dirty in the prologue but is more restrained once she becomes the reincarnated Helen character. This is a blood-splashing monster revenge flick and writer Naschy hits all the required mummy movie tropes along the way, delivering ample H.G. Lewis-style head-smashing gore but skimping on the usual amount of bare flesh. (As with many Naschy films, two versions of several scenes were shot, clothed and unclothed. While it is easy to imagine where the unclothed sequences would pop up, those sequences have been lost over the years.) This is a unique mummy movie in that Amenhotep speaks via telepathy and spends much of his time bossing Assad Bey around to score him some chicks. While many a Naschy fan focuses squarely on his work as El Hombre Lobo and the Waldemar Daninsky werewolf series, **The Mummy's Revenge** reminds us that Naschy played many different creatures of the night over his long career. (He should be considered one of the true icons of horror as far as I'm concerned, joining the ranks of such luminaries as Cushing, Lee, Vincent Price and Barbara Steele.)

**The Mummy's Revenge** was shot in 1973 and skipped a Stateside theatrical release, going directly to television in 1975. In 1986 a cropped, dim VHS copy appeared via the Unicorn label, then a copy was made available from Sinister Cinema. (It is currently out on a double feature disc with Naschy's **Vengeance of the Zombies** from SC.) Scorpion Releasing delivers this new widescreen HD transfer and it is glorious to behold. The colors are vibrant and sharp and the picture finally has room to breathe. Scenes rendered too dark in previous formats look fantastic and eerie here and the rich set dressing can really be appreciated. The film is offered in both the U.S. edition and the slightly longer Spanish version that includes an extra scene. Bonus material incorporates a commentary by film historian Troy Howarth and trailers for other Naschy films. Keep an eye on Scorpion Releasing, as they plan on issuing Blu-rays of Naschy's **Assignment Terror** (1970) and **Fury of the Wolfman** (1972) next. ♀

—Rob Freese

## Phantom Fave!

### VINEGAR SYNDROME

(\$32.98 Blu-ray + DVD Combo Pack) 9/19

THE VINEYARD (1988) ♀☆☆

D: James Hong, Bill Rice. James Hong, Karen Witter, Michael Wong, Lars Wanberg, Cheryl Madsen, Cheryl Lawton. 95 mins.

While veteran character king James Hong (VS #73) has appeared, often in villainous roles, in scores of movies ranging in budget from "A" to "Z," he received top billing in only one. Not so coincidentally, **The Vineyard** is also the only film he co-directed (he also co-scripted). The result is an invigoratingly awful camp classic. Hong toplines as Dr. Po, mastermind behind an evil brand of rejuvenating *vino* brewed from (what else?) human flesh and virgin blood. To succeed at this reverse transubstantiative process, Po lures unsuspecting victims to his island redoubt via promises of instant movie stardom. Most of the young hopefuls who accept his dubious offer end up buried alive (a la *Rory Calhoun's* victims in *Kevin Connor's* cult cannibal romp **Motel Hell**) and cultivated for eventual fermentation. Hong establishes Dr. Po's cruel nature early on. After he catches his mistress doing the deed with one of his henchmen, he barks out the following memorable commands: "Castrate him!" "Kill the eunuch!" In short, a typically busy day at Chateau Po. Hong tosses all manner of crowd-pleasing elements into his horror-film vat: a cellar filled with chained semi-nude nubiles, some disgusto bug-regurgitation scenes, lots of kung-fu action, and cheesy aging FX. Hong may have been trying to emulate the wacky action of such superior Hong Kong fright fare as **Mr. Vampire** or **Kung-Fu Zombie** or John Carpenter's Stateside variation **Big Trouble in Little China** but what he wound up with is homebrewed schlock of the lowest order, one that bad-movie buffs and Hong fans won't want to miss. Lavish extras on *Vinegar Syndrome's* 4K Blu-ray + DVD combo set include **Welcome to the Vineyard**, a new interview with director/actor Hong and producer/actor Harry Mok; **Zombies from San Jose**, a new interview with co-director Rice; **Sacred Earth and Restless Souls**, an interview with cinematographer John Dirlam; and the original theatrical trailer. ♀

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# BEST OF THE FESTS

# POPCORN

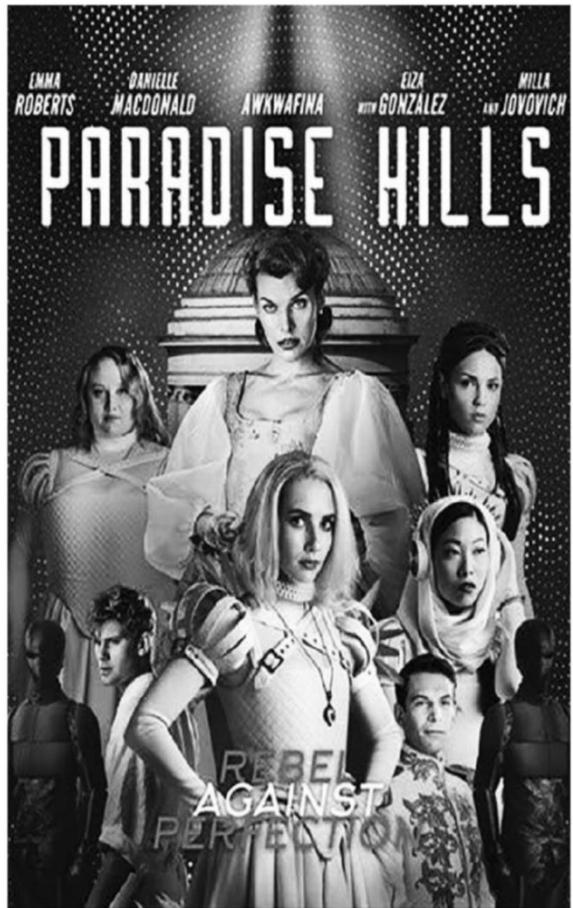
# FRIGHTS

By Joseph Perry

The fifth annual Popcorn Frights horror film festival took place in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, from August 8–16, 2019, boasting a lineup of 24 feature films and 50 shorts from 16 countries. Here's a look at four of the features.

Director Brandon Christensen follows up his 2017 debut *Still/Born* with the Canadian shocker *Z*. The film chronicles the Parsons family and its struggles as young son Joshua (Jett Kline) grows dangerously close to his titular imaginary friend. Though the film indulges in some basic “evil child or supernatural force?” tropes—such as mother Elizabeth (Keegan Connor Tracy) witnessing all sorts of dreadful events while disbelieving husband Kevin (Sean Rogerson) is away at work, and Joshua doing increasingly disturbing things that eventually alienate him from school and friends—Christensen and co-writer Colin Minihan (who also co-wrote *Spiral* and *Still/Born*, and directed *It Stains the Sands Red*) use those chestnuts as a springboard. The result is a truly eerie effort that earns the emotional investment of viewers and delivers surprises that rely on solid storytelling and gripping performances rather than a bevy of special effects. *Z* won Popcorn Frights’ Scariest Film Award.

**Queen of Spades: The Looking Glass** provides a Russian take on the Bloody Mary “stare into the mirror” horror trope. This enjoyable ghost story makes up with impressive set design and enthusiastic performances what it lacks in originality, offering an effort that gives viewers the creeps rather than out-and-out scares. Teenager Olga (Angelina Strechina) and her younger half-brother Artyom (Danil Izotov) are placed in a private school by their estranged father, who lives abroad after they survive a car accident that claimed their mother’s life. Artyom sees his mother calling to him to join her, while Olga and some of her new schoolmates play the scary mirror game. Each of the teens makes a wish. This being a horror film, the malevolent titular specter ensures that their dreams come true in twisted ways they regret, then kills them. Nikita Khorkov’s art direction, including the wonderfully eerie design of the forbidden area that houses the mirror, is a highlight. Aleksey Strellov’s cinematography is also top-notch, expertly capturing the spooky mood. The film covers familiar territory for seasoned horror-movie buffs, but director Aleksandr Domogarov, working from a screenplay by Maria Ogneva, helms his debut feature with self-assuredness and an obvious affection for the genre. He balances atmospheric set pieces and jump scares well, offering a good amount of dread and suspense. Strechina stands out as the resentful, vulnerable, emotionally scarred Olga, while Izotov is equally impressive as a young boy who becomes increasingly disturbed.



The acting and all technical aspects are solid, and **Infección** gets its political messages and emotional drama across.

The Venezuelan/Mexican co-production **Infección (Infection)** parallels director Flavio Pedota’s vision of current-day Venezuela with the rapid spread of a virus that causes people to become flesh-eating ghouls. The film centers on medical doctor Adam Vargas (Rubén Guevera) and his search for his young son Miguelito (Luca de Lima), whom the physician had sent to stay with a relative living in the country before the outbreak. As in many virus, zombie, and post-apocalyptic films, the doctor traverses a large stretch of land, meeting up with kind people, deadly strangers, and random attacks from the afflicted. Though not bringing much new to the table, the film does offer a unique angle as the first film out of Venezuela in this particular fright-fare sub-genre and provides plenty of local scenery, from graffiti-sprayed urban locations to rural settings.

**Paradise Hills** is a sumptuous-looking dystopian science fiction fantasy about an island-bound finishing school for young women who aren’t quietly going along with parental and societal plans. The titular school is run by the Duchess (Milla Jovovich, who chews up the scenery in a fun performance), an elegantly regal woman who means to have her young charges conform to certain standards no matter how rebellious the girls are. The school is lush and brimming with amenities, but once admitted, no one can leave until the Duchess feels they have been properly educated—that is, brainwashed. Uma (Emma Roberts), who wants nothing to do with a marriage arranged by her parents, isn’t easily swayed by luxury. She bonds with pop musician Amarna (Eiza Gonzales), Southern belle Chloe (Danielle McDonald), and distressed, headphones-wearing Yu (Awkwafina). The costumes, set design, and Josu Inchaustegui’s cinematography are all undeniably beautiful, and director Alice Waddington has created a marvelously unique cinematic world containing many fairy-tale elements. For all of its visual inventiveness, though, this Spanish production doesn’t supply much originality in the characterization and story departments. It does offer enough in its feminist take, resplendent ambience, and mystery elements to recommend it for a viewing. Waddington is unquestionably a talent to watch. ♀

# BEST OF THE FESTS

## FILMQUEST

By Joseph Perry  
& Eric Li

The sixth annual FilmQuest ran at Velour in Provo, Utah, September 6–14, showcasing more than 190 genre features and shorts. Here are our thoughts on seven films we were fortunate enough to view.

**Joseph Perry:** The Australian horror effort **Blood Vessel** opens during World War II with a life raft of starving survivors of a sunken ship: Captain Malone (Robert Taylor), British nurse Jane Prescott (Alyssa Sutherland), American cook Jackson (Christopher Kirby), his supervisor Bigelow (Mark Diaco), Australian POW Sinclair (Nathan Phillips), Russian sniper Teplov (Alex Cooke) and suspicious injured British mystery man Faraday (John Lloyd Fillingham). When an empty Nazi ship floats their way, they board it and find a decent amount of rations and a scared little girl. After a great deal of infighting with Prescott trying to act as a peacemaker—which, thanks to sturdy dialogue courtesy of director Justin Dix and co-writer Jordan Prosser, builds both characterization and tension—the ragtag group discovers that something very nonhuman and very hungry accounts for the absence of Nazis. **Blood Vessel** concentrates more on atmosphere and mystery than gore, with Dix exploiting the claustrophobic setting and delivering some fine jolts. The ensemble cast is solid. The film won three Cthulhu Trophy awards at FilmQuest: Best Supporting Actress–Feature, for Sutherland’s performance, which is certainly well-deserved; Best Production Design/Art Direction–Feature; and Best Costumes–Feature.

**Eric Li:** Superior prosthetic and practical effects and a stunning setting cannot make up for the hot mess of a plot that drives **Wild Boar**. Savage mutant pig people have created a community in the badlands of the American Southwest and have been capturing and consuming stray travelers unlucky enough to stumble into their territory. Pretty soon, however, you realize this is **The Hills Have Eyes** in pigskin. The film opens promisingly enough, with a couple scouring a watering hole looking for geocache stashes. Kitty (Reina Hardesty) will be your protagonist, your plucky and pretty optimist happy with whatever they find. Her boyfriend, Wolf (Daniel Roebuck), some 20 years her senior, is pedantic and condescending. He loves geocaching and is on the hunt for real artifacts. It’s a relationship built on shaky ground. Wolf and Kitty are informed that the greatest geocache of all time has been left in

a remote canyon subjected to nuclear weapon testing. They are convinced by their stoner pal Griffin (Michael Reed) and his sexy hippie girlfriend Sable (Jessica Sonneborn) that this will be the find of a lifetime, and never mind the biohazard risk. It’s reportedly safe now, just use long sleeves and sunscreen, or so says Wolf’s doofy brother, Turtle (Jim Nieb). (Note that they fail to heed even these basic precautions.) What could possibly go wrong? The cache location is at an abandoned graffiti-covered hovel at the border of a radioactive nowhere. The crew discovers a strange beacon. More intriguing, though, is a hole in the wall leading to a passage into the mountain. At this point, the movie decides to go extremely meta, suggesting that in a scary movie going into the tunnel is a terrible idea. The film shifts into a captive vs. captor game in the vein of **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** or the more recent gorefest **The Farm**. The third act had me scratching my head at how many bad decisions the survivors could actually survive as they struggle to get back to civilization. The movie is promoted as **Barney Burman’s Wild Boar**. Burman is an Oscar-winning makeup artist who cut his teeth on **Star Trek** and **Grimm**, and he appears onscreen as a crazy captive from a prior expedition. It is evident that Burman has a long way to go in his directing and writing. Loving long shots of the canyon scenery lend a bit of exoticism to the proceedings, but in the end the movie seemed like an interesting visual concept in search of a good story.

**Wild Boar** won the Cthulhu Trophy for Best Makeup–Feature.

**JP:** FilmQuest served up a pair of interesting thrillers set in rural America. **Swing Low** combines redneck terror with rape-revenge horror in a frenetic, turbulent manner as nature photographer Harper Sykes (Anabelle Dexter-Jones, who won the Cthulhu Trophy for Best Actress–Feature) stumbles across an act of savagery in the fictitious Watchatoomy Valley and finds herself captured by lackeys of area leader Ravener (Robert Longstreet), a vicious sadist. Sykes is no easy target, though, and after being accosted by these men, she escapes and hunts them down on their own turf. Writer/director Teddy Grennan delivers a pulse-pounding actionfest loaded with tension and grue. Dexter-Jones gives a superb performance that requires a great deal physically, and she and Longstreet play off each other marvelously. Bruce Dern has an impressive extended cameo as the aged valley patriarch. One slight problem with **Swing Low** is that it telegraphs at the beginning events that will happen later, so viewers are expecting those scenes, which takes some element of surprise out of the third act. Overall, though, **Swing Low** is a thriller heavy on brutality bolstered by outstanding work by its two leads.



**Burning Kentucky** is a much quieter, more meditative thriller focusing on troubled and complicated relationships. Aria (Emilie Dhir) is a young woman who lives on a stretch of land dubbed Ten Acres of Hell. She is in a secret relationship with well-off town resident Wyatt (Nick McCallum). Wyatt is the son of alcoholic lawman Jaxon (John Pyper-Ferguson) and the younger brother of lowlife junkie Rule (Nathan Sutton), who lives—exists is probably a better word for his situation—with girlfriend Jolene (Augie Duke). The relationships among all these characters is filled with secrets, and most of their lives are suffocating. Aria’s family was slaughtered when she was younger and she has stayed on their forest property ever since. As she pieces together what happened, and as mysteries unravel, the proceedings head toward a nail-biting climax. Writer/director Bethany Brooke Anderson has crafted a gorgeously shot slice of cinema that offers up heart-wrenching drama with its revenge-thriller elements. Her characters feel real and lived-in and her dialogue is strikingly composed. The performances are superb, with Duke standing out thanks to her sympathetic portrayal of a drug addict who wants to escape her circumstances but is trapped in an area where dreams are constantly crushed.

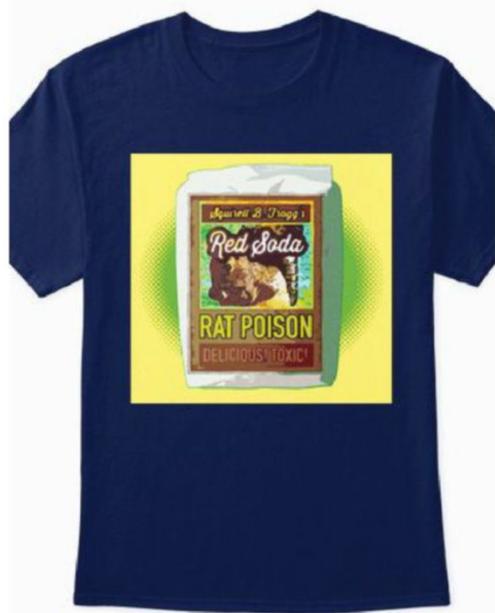


**EL:** In *Making Monsters*, Christian Brand (Tim Loden) is a digital prankster who has reached 10 million fans on his YouTube channel, where he dresses in costume and jump-scares his fiancée Allie (Alana Elmer) into histrionics. Chris thinks he is empowering people to embrace their fears but he is actually a grown man with some maturity issues. Allie is worn out with all his shenanigans and wants to settle down and have a baby. Chris is forced to decide between his baby (the channel) and a potential real baby. The couple accepts an invitation from one of Chris's old friends, Jesse (King Chiu), who bought a church out in the country to share with his new husband David. When Chris and Allie arrive at the church, they are entertained by the eccentric David (Jonathan Craig) and the three of them eat, drink, and party until the wee hours of the morning. When morning comes, things have completely changed. David is missing. Allie encountered a bloody apparition of a ghost who abducted her in the middle of the night. When Chris wakes, he finds Allie standing in the backyard, naked in the snow. The heat is off, their phones are missing, the car is gone, and they have found hidden video cameras in the house. What's more, four days seem to have passed while they were asleep. Chris and Allie have had their existence flipped. It's not just the ghost they have to worry about. Someone is hunting them for some unknown reason, and now the church has become the proverbial cabin in the woods. *Making Monsters* is a good example of the current trend of using a small cast to construct a horror film built on the power of the protagonists' relationships. The dialogue is crisp enough that you don't feel bogged down by the narrative. Directors Justin Harding and Rob Brunner provide the film with an excellent pace. When the violence arrives,

it is impactful, bloody, and dreadful. The acting is excellent throughout, and I wouldn't be surprised if any of the three leads, particularly Loden, go on to bigger gigs.

**JP:** *The Twilight Zone* meets *Groundhog Day* in director D.C. Hamilton's *The Fare*, a satisfying and surprising take on repetitive time-loop science fiction tales. Harris (Gino Anthony Pesi) is a cabdriver who listens to radio talk shows discussing aliens, time displacement, and male and female relationships. He picks up a fare named Penny (Brinna Kelly, who wrote the screenplay) in the middle of nowhere, and the two have an engaging conversation—until she suddenly disappears a few minutes later. Harris gets a call from his dispatcher to pick up his next fare, who turns out to be Penny again. To describe anything beyond this point would be to do a disservice to future viewers; suffice it to say that the relationship between these two characters grows stronger and goes to decidedly unexpected places. The film is essentially a two-hander, and Pesi and Kelly share delightful chemistry. Their relationship and dialogue make the taxi setting feel comfortable and intimate rather than claustrophobic. Harris is the audience surrogate and it is fun to figure things out with him as layers of mystery are slowly revealed. *The Fare* will have most viewers rooting for a positive outcome for its time-trapped characters.

**EL:** *Finale* is a piano wire tight bit of nightmare from Danish helmer Søren Juul Petersen, making his directorial debut at age 56. Petersen weaves a compelling narrative populated by sympathetic and well-drawn characters. The opening scene shows a confused and frightened young woman, Agnes (Anne Bergfeld), being held captive in a storage container, beaten, confused, and justifiably freaked out. Then we jump back in time to a second story thread, where we see Agnes being dropped off by her young doctor boyfriend Benjamin (Kristoffer Fabricius) at a remote gas station her father owns. She will be working there with Belinda (Karin Michelsen), a tough blue-collar employee who resents Agnes' privileged life. It is revealed that there have been a series of abductions of local young women. The few people who drop by are a sketchy lot, and the women are on edge the whole evening. Little things suggest they are being watched and toyed with. As we periodically switch back to the other narrative thread, we are told that Agnes has been captured to be the participant in a twisted online show put on for the amusement of a paying audience. I hesitate to call *Finale* torture porn, but it does not flinch in depicting some graphic, painful, and achingly horrifying violence inflicted on its key characters. Think Miike's *Audition* for an emotionally comparable film. Kudos to all the actors, who turn what could be hopelessly unfortunate victims into people you root for. This is not a film for the timid, but if you can stomach some brutality, this is a wonderfully paced and plotted movie that will leave you exhausted and impressed right up to its...finale. ♀



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### **MONDO LASLO**

#### **CAPTAIN JARVIS AND THE RED SODA KID** (2019) ♀♀

D: William Stancik. Alex Wood, Joe Zumba, J. Gabriel Wagner, Bennie Rockum, Wendy Stancik. 70 mins.

Ever-idiomatic William Stancik follows his previous feature *Mr. Deviltree* (VS #112) with what may be his most surreal outing yet (and that's going some). *Captain Jarvis and the Red Soda Kid* again plunges us into a realm of pandemic PacWest insanity, focusing on, among many other things, an alleged assassin (Zumba) influenced by flashbacks to a *Clutch Cargo*-like kiddie show, hosted by old salt Captain Jarvis (Rockum), where human mouths are superimposed over talking killer dolls, and further twisted by the toxic titular beverage, allegedly laced with brain-damaging swamp water. Also on view are kite-flying interludes, appearances by what looks to be the world's oldest disco habitué, understandably puzzled shrinks, and other offbeat spectacles, all rendered in Stancik's trademark trippy audiovisual style, a mix of live action, animation, and collage serving digressive narratives driven by deadpan dialogue delivered by the filmmaker's veteran repertory crew. A recent recipient of a Toronto ALTF Best Narrative Feature nomination, *Captain Jarvis and the Red Soda Kid* shapes up as a welcome addition to Laslo Films' expanding archives. For more movie madness, 'scope out laslofilms.com where *Captain Jarvis* and previous Laslo features—*Jeremiah's Woods*, *Stripers and Blow*, *Blank Frank* and *Mr. Deviltree*, along with assorted shorts, Space Cruisers episodes, trailers and ephemera—are available for viewing. ♀

— *The Phantom*

# BEST OF THE FESTS

## FANTASTIC FEST

By Joseph Perry

The renowned Fantastic Fest held its 2019 edition September 19–26 in Austin, Texas. The five films reviewed here merely hint at the wide variety of quality international genre fare presented at this year's fest.

Argentine director Mariano Cohn sets his thriller **4x4**, for the most part, in an SUV parked on a Buenos Aires street. Petty thief Ciro (Peter Lanzani) breaks into the vehicle intent on stealing a few items and sticking it to the man by urinating on the seats, but instead finds himself trapped inside the sound-proof, remotely controlled car. Owner Enrique Ferrari (Dady Brieva) is tired of being the victim of criminals and has rigged the SUV to act as a torture dungeon on wheels. Cohn, who co-wrote the screenplay with Gaston Duprat, wrings every bit of possible suspense from his claustrophobic setting and finds clever ways of using practically every inch of space within it from many different angles to keep the action inventive. Cohn and Duprat also put Ciro through several different in-vehicle torture scenarios, and the streetwise character doesn't do himself any favors by trying to shoot his way out. Ferrari is highly effective as a mysterious character introduced through the car's sound system, but once he arrives in person and the setting expands outside the SUV, the proceedings become less exciting. The film creates a unique spin on single-setting nail-biters and

offers a good deal of social commentary on Argentina's current political climate and class differences, especially in the third act.

The Greek offering **Cosmic Candy** is an odd one, pushed as a comedy drama but containing very little of the former for this reviewer, with its comedic attempts tipping more toward amusing than outright funny. Thirty-something Anna lives a rigid though offbeat "real world" life at her supermarket job and in her apartment but is given to surreal flights of fantasy often involving the titular sweet (basically Pop Rocks under a different name). When free-spirited school-age neighbor Persa wants to stay with Anna because her father—who may owe money to some shady types—has not returned home, Anna finds her life turned upside down. The cast—which includes Dimitris Lalos, Maria Kitsou, Antonis Tsotsiopoulos, Pipera Maya, and Dimitris Drosos—does a solid job throughout. Director Rinio Dragasaki blends heavy drama about abandonment with whimsical, colorful scenes of dreamlike fancy, and the result is a quirky and engaging, if sometimes uneven, effort.

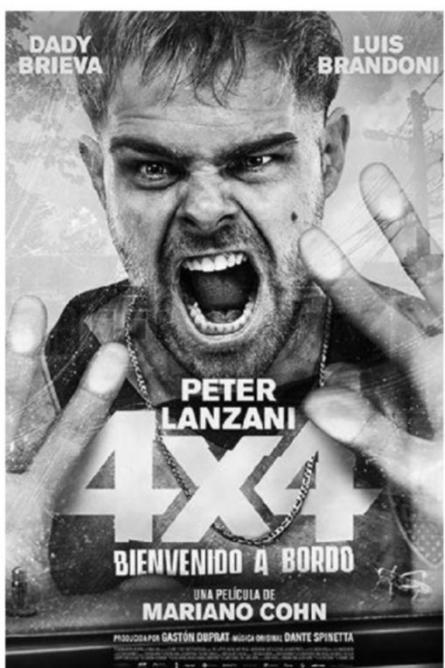
Directors Raphaël Hernandez and Savitry Joly-Gonfard, working under the pseudonym Seth Ickerman, serve up an absolutely mind-blowing 50 minutes of eye and ear candy with the English-language French production **Blood Machines**. Space scavengers Vascan (Anders Heinrichsen) and Lago (Christian Erickson) land their ship on remote planet Apus 7 to salvage another space-craft. The men encounter a group of women on the ship who are determined to protect it. A humanoid in the form of a naked woman bedecked in both various colors and a none-too-subtle upside-down cross comes to their aid. The men chase the humanoid through the galaxy, and, as fans of science fiction horror might guess, things are unlikely to turn out well for the duo. The performances are solid, but the real stars are the jaw-dropping hypnotic visual effects by Chadi Abo and his large crew and the pulsating score by French synthwave artist Carpenter Brut. Fans of 1970s and 1980s offerings such as **Lifeforce**, **Blade Runner**, and **Heavy Metal**, along with the scores of John Carpenter—the film has elements of 1960s Eurohorror and space operas, too—should find plenty to cheer about with **Blood Machines**.

House-of-crazies chaos meets terrorize-the-invalid horror in the Argentine shocker **Rock, Paper, and Scissors** (*Piedra, papel y tijera*). Shut-in siblings María José (Valeria Giorcelli) and Jesús (Pablo Sigal) have nursed their father since his suicide attempt. After he passes, their half-sister Magdalena (Augustina Cerviño) comes to help sort things out, including their inheritances. After a "Did she fall or was she



pushed?" trip down the family staircase, Magdalena finds herself confined to a bed and at the sadistic mercy of the other two. Games of one-upmanship and changing alliances begin, and the proceedings stay dark and weird throughout this one-location three-hander. Jesús fashions a homemade horror movie starring Magdalena, who is actually a renowned actress, and María José lives out her obsession with the film version of **The Wizard of Oz**. Based on a stage play in which two of the film's actors starred, **Rock, Paper, and Scissors** is disquieting and claustrophobic, guaranteeing uneasy but worthwhile viewing.

**Iron Fists and Kung Fu Kicks** is an exciting Australian documentary about Hong Kong martial-arts movies and the huge effect they have had on popular culture around the world. Starting with the 1960s and the Shaw Brothers films, the doc weaves a timeline of Asian martial arts movies, along with American and Australian home-video-heyday releases to modern-day Thai and Ugandan action cinema. Interviews with filmmakers, choreographers, and stars past and present, plus loads of superb clips from classic and not-so-classic movies, make this both a fun introduction to the genre and a deeper dive for viewers already familiar with it. The genre's sway on Blaxploitation films may be somewhat obvious, but how it heavily influenced break-dancing and hip hop culture is just one of the many interesting subjects that director Serge Ou explores. The film tackles its myriad topics at a rapid pace, touching on almost every related thread imaginable; as a result, some subjects and personalities receive only cursory coverage. On the other hand, the doc deserves kudos for its sheer scope. **Iron Fists and Kung Fu Kicks** works as both a thrilling primer for those new to the genre and a fine refresher course for its ardent fans. ♀



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## Rob Freese's BEST OF THE SPAGHETTI WEST

### DJANGO THE BASTARD (1969)

★ ★ 1/2

D: Sergio Garrone. Anthony Steffen, Paolo Gozlini, Luciano Rossi, Rada Rassimov, Teodoro Corra. 99 mins. (Synapse) 10/19

The mysterious, almost spectral-like gunfighter Django (Steffen) suddenly appears to a number of people, delivering grave markers etched with their name and the date before gunning them down and sending them to Hell. Django barely speaks and when he does it is hardly above a whisper as he metes out his six-gun justice and gets ever closer to the lead villain Major Murdock (Gozlino). When the beautiful Alida Murdock (Rassimov) tries to sway him with money to run away with her, he has no interest. He is on a mission. A Civil War flashback shows drunken Confederate soldier Django finding all the men of his unit slaughtered under the command of turncoat officer Major Rod Murdock. The gunfights are swift and in my favorite scene of just about any spaghetti western ever made, Django sends a trio of dead mercenaries back to Murdock on horseback, lashed to crosses. Many criticisms have been launched at Steffen for his wooden western roles and his tendency to mimic Eastwood's Man With No Name, but here he shows more range. Sure, for most of the movie he's doing the silent vengeance thing, but in the flashback we see an entirely different man, animated, clumsy and scared. It's a nice transformation and gives this Django some dimension. Gozlini was born to play bad guys. Rossi, who portrays the Major's twisted brother, has a screen presence akin to Klaus Kinski but maybe just a pinch crazier. (We saw him last, playing a similar perverted sibling, in Joe D'Amato's **Death Smiles on a Murderer** [VS #112].) Rassimov is another in the long line of spunky, resourceful sagebrush beauties. This is my favorite of the "Sons of Django" flicks that followed in the wake of the original Sergio Corbucci/Franco Nero hit. Synapse's HD transfer is beautiful, and a commentary by film historian Troy Howarth accompanies the film. When Herman Cohen brought the movie Stateside in 1974, he changed the title to **The Stranger's Gun-down**. Under any name, it is well worth your time.

### HANDS OF A GUNFIGHTER (1965)

★ ★ 1/2

D: Rafael Romero Merchant. Craig Hill, Gloria Milland, Carlos Romero Merchant, Jesus Puente, Piero Lulli, Conchita Nunez. 73 mins. (Amazon Prime)

Dan Murphy (Hill) has given up the gunfighting life and is looking for a place to settle with his wife Miriam (Milland) and their infant son when Sheriff Roger (Puente) takes a shot at him and kills the son. In retaliation, Dan steals the sheriff's infant son to raise him as his own. Four years later, Dan and Miriam are living on a little piece of land close to their young friend Pat (Merchant) and his fiancée, but things get rough when the Castle brothers move into town and start bullying Pat. Dan steps in and later takes a beating for interfering. To make matters worse, a bounty hunter shows up and demands to take the boy back to Sheriff Roger. Dan and Miriam are heartbroken but have no choice. When Pat ties it up with the youngest Castle sibling, the other brothers show up to murder Pat and his wife and burn their homestead. This is too much for Dan, who finally straps on his old six-shooter and heads out to kill every last Castle in the state. This one plays it pretty straight, with a little humor; at its center is a man trying to do right but fate keeps pulling him in the other direction. The version I watched on Prime is a scant 73 minutes, but most sources report an 88-minute running time. (It was also released theatrically in widescreen format; this version is full screen.) The film has a choppy, at times hard-to-follow storyline because of the missing footage and it is not clear who the young boy Dan and Miriam are raising until the bounty hunter shows up demanding his return to Sheriff Roger. Hill does well, but I never bought him as the once cold-blooded killer. Maybe if someone like Anthony Steffen had played the part, I could have believed the backstory more fully. Nothing special but not a bad way to kill some time when you have some time to kill.

### MISS DYNAMITE (1972)

D: Sergio Grieco. Antonio Sabato, Marisa Mell, Fernando Sancho, Peter Carsten, Lionel Stander, Franco Pesce. 72 mins. (Amazon Prime)

Wandering scoundrel Jackpot Poe (Sabato) enters a tavern to gun down a hitman who supposedly killed his brother. Pigsty (Pesce), an old prospector, witnesses the duel and hires Jackpot to help him locate some missing pieces to a map etched onto stones that leads to a treasure of hidden gold. To seal the deal, Pigsty takes Jackpot to the local brothel to blow off some steam. Pigsty ends up dying after a bout of fierce lovemaking, and Jackpot teams up with beautiful singer Lulu Belle (Mell), who has a piece of the map. The rest of the story involves Jackpot and Lulu going against a German gunslinger, a wacky South of the Border colonel and a gangster from Chicago to obtain the remaining pieces



of the map. This is a fairly forgettable comedy-western that draws its slapstick inspiration from no less than the Three Stooges. It's so goofy it's distracting, especially when mob boss Lucky Capone (Stander) and crew roll into town in a couple of dust-covered roadsters after a long drive from the Midwest. Sabato is having fun as the carefree bandit but he's no Giuliano Gemma/Montgomery Wood. Mell is quite fetching, especially when the light catches her eyes just right. I had never heard of this one before finding it on Prime. A quick online search shows there is little love for **Miss Dynamite** (aka **Where the Bullets Fly** and **All the Brothers of the West Support Their Father**) from Italo western fans. (The constant oddball humor is too much for staunch sagebrush devotees.) The version showing on Prime runs a choppy 72 minutes, while most online sources report a more robust running time of 96 minutes. This could almost be an edited version for TV, as it seems many obscenities have been cut, but the film still has a couple moments of nudity. (For what it offers, 72 minutes is sufficient.) If you're a fan, give it a watch. I don't know that anyone is planning on picking it up to restore and remaster any time soon. ♀

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# YOU OWE ME AN ANSWER

by Nancy Naglin

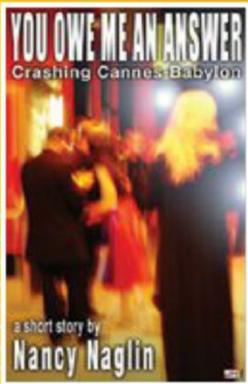
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#### ABOUT NANCY NAGLIN:

Author, film critic and freelance writer Nancy Naglin has been the Art-House columnist for *The Phantom of the Movies' VideoScope* since 1993. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including *The New York Daily News*, *New York Magazine*, *The Village Voice* and *Crawdaddy*.

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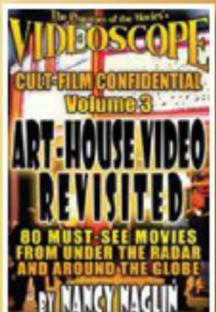
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**KINO LORBER FILMS:** The Pink Panther Cartoon Collection Volume 6  
**SHOUT! FACTORY:** Funan (2-disc Blu-ray + DVD)  
**WARNER ARCHIVE:** Popeye the Sailor Collection

## TELE-VIDEO

**ACORN MEDIA:** Line of Duty Series 5, London Kills Series 2 (2-disc each)  
**FILM CHEST:** Deadline (3-disc)  
**KINO LORBER:** Stephen King's Storm of the Century  
**MILL CREEK ENTERTAINMENT:** Heroes in Blue, Ultra Q Complete Series 01 (4-disc), Ultraman Geed Series + Movie, Ultraman: Protector of the Universe Complete Series 02 (6-disc Blu-ray each), Ultraman Orb (4-disc), Ultra-Seven Complete Series  
**MVD VISUAL:** David Susskind: Interview with Dr. Martin Luther King, The Dick Cavett Show: New York Radio Pioneers  
**SHOUT! FACTORY:** 2019 World Series Champions Washington Nationals  
**TIME LIFE:** Robin Williams: Comic Genius (5-disc)  
**20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY FOX:** Lost in Space: The Complete First Season, Vikings Season 5 Volume 2  
**WARNER HOME ENTERTAINMENT:** Doom Patrol: The Complete First Season, Veronica Mars: The Complete First Season

## VINTAGE VIDEO

**ARTSPLOITATION:** The Devil's Playground, The Man with the Magic Box, Terror 5  
**FILM MOVEMENT:** Harmonia, An Israeli Love Story  
**INDIEPIX:** The Demons, Family, A Feast of Men, Genese  
**KINO LORBER:** Noon Wine, This Magnificent Cake, Three Peaks  
**LIONSGATE:** The Driver, The Drone, Mayday  
**MILL CREEK:** Houses of Hell Collection, SAF3 2: Under Pressure  
**MONARCH:** American Beach House, Back of the Net, Bikini Model Academy, Country Christmas Album, A Snow White Christmas  
**MVD VISUAL:** I See You/Reach Me, Pretenders  
**WARNER ARCHIVE:** Best of the Pete Smith Specialties Vol. 1, This Time for Keeps

## VIDEO VERITE

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**FIRST RUN FEATURES: The Corporate**

**Coup D'Etat**

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**KINO LORBER: George: The Story of George Maciunas and Fluxus, The Great Mystical Circus, Leaving Home, Coming Home: A Portrait of Robert Frank, The Sentence, Walking on Water, Wavy Gravy Movie: Saint Misbehavin', Zen for Nothing**

**MPI MEDIA: The Quiet One**

**MVD VISUAL: Barbara Rubin and the Exploding NY Underground, GG Allin All in the Family, I'll Never Forget You: The Last 72 Hours of Lynard Skynyrd, The Pretenders, Voice of the Eagle: The Enigma of Ronnie Barsho**

**VCI ENTERTAINMENT: Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?**

**WILD EYE RELEASIG: Danger God**

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**INDIEPIX: Yesterday Was a Lie**

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# PHANTOM BOOKSHELF

## HE WHO TYPES BETWEEN THE ROWS: A DECADE OF HORROR

DRIVE-IN By Mark Sieber. Cemetery Dance Publications. Softcover. 442 pages.

In the early days of the 21st century, Mark Sieber was already a long-time fan of horror movies and novels, spending as much time catching double features at the drive-in as he did haunting the horror stacks at his local vid emporiums and bookstores. He became invested in various online message boards and found himself connecting with like-minded fear fans, as well as authors and filmmakers, from all over the world. Message boards grew as more and more people migrated into cyberspace.

In 2006 Sieber launched his own message board and Horror Drive-in was born. Not only did Horror Drive-in provide a place for fans to talk about books and movies, it gave Sieber a platform from which he could share his thoughts on any old topic he liked in regularly posted essays.

**He Who Types Between the Rows** is a collection of these essays, spanning the early months of 2006 up to early 2017. These collected writings offer a wonderful, if oftentimes bittersweet history of our beloved horror genre during this era. Sieber sweeps us away to a time not that long ago, reminding us of the joys of excitedly waiting for "New Release Tuesday" to snap up new DVDs and the exhilarating times when small press publishers were releasing excellent deluxe books week after week.

Sieber writes in a straightforward, candid manner, allowing himself vulnerable moments while reminiscing about some sweet memory from his past. I fondly remember participating in the Horror Drive-in boards and connecting with so many other fans. It was like going to a horror convention via the computer keyboard every night.

Times change, things happen, life goes on. Horror Drive-in still exists but it no longer supports a message board. Social media killed the boards and constant spamming was the final nail in the coffin. And that's okay. Life is an ever-changing journey, as we see in these writings. The greatest takeaway for me is Sieber's unstoppable positive attitude that with all the new books and movies constantly coming out, his next favorite novel or author or movie is waiting on the road ahead. Even if you were unaware of Mark Sieber and Horror Drive-in, I believe any fan of the genre will benefit from and have a good time with this book. ♦

—Rob Freese

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—Joe Bob Briggs



## DIGITAL DEBUTS

### ARROW VIDEO

(\$29.95 Blu-ray) 7/19

#### THE LOVELESS (1981) 8 8 8 1/2

D: Kathryn Bigelow, Monty Montgomery. Willem Dafoe, Robert Gordon, Marin Kanter, J. Don Ferguson, Tina L'Hotsky. 82 mins.

A scaled-down post-modern **The Wild One** with a rockabilly beat (much of it provided by musician costar Gordon), **The Loveless**—initially titled **U.S. Highway 17**, then the more generic but accurate **Breakdown**—marked the moody feature-film debut (with co-director/producer Montgomery) of future cinematic heavyweight Bigelow, who went on to helm the redneck vampire classic **Near Dark** (VS #45) and the Oscar-netting **The Hurt Locker** (VS #74), among many other memorable movies. 25-year-old Dafoe scored his first major role as Vance, nominal leader of a squad of perennially preening bikers who stall out in a small Southern town on their way to Daytona, circa 1958. The town, set designed with almost fetishistic precision, from its sleek sports cars to sweaty dive bars, soon draws the gang into its intrigues as Vance, mostly out of boredom, becomes involved with fast-driving teen wild girl Telena (Kanter) and her sleazy, abusive local big-shot dad Tarver (Ferguson) while trying to keep hotheaded cohort Davis (Gordon) in line. The dual directors and cinematographer Doyle Smith capture the location's dangerous languor with admirable fidelity, at times creating an ambience that verges on virtual reality while maintaining an almost anthropological emotional distance. Once the action does heat up, it explodes with a random inevitability that packs a devastating gut-punch. Though completed in 1981 (as an NYU film thesis, no less), **The Loveless** didn't see release until 1983. (We recall a push to sell it as a midnight movie when it briefly played in that time slot at Greenwich Village's Waverly Theater.) While Dafoe was the sole thesp to enjoy a major film career, the entire cast pulls its thespic weight here, with Kanter and erstwhile downtown diva Tina L'Hotsky as Debbie, the lone girl in the cycle gang, especially impressing. Arrow Video's pristine print further polishes the filmmakers' vision, while the disc boasts a wealth of compelling extras, highlighted by **No Man's Friend Today: Making The Loveless**, featuring new video interviews with actors Dafoe, Kanter, Gordon, Phillip Kimbrough and Lawrence Matarese. Other featurettes include **U.S. 17: Shooting The Loveless**, and **Chrome and Hot Leather: The Look of The Loveless**, with set designer Lilly Kilvert. Also onboard are a new audio commentary with Montgomery, moderated by Elijah Drenner, an audio interview with musician Eddy Dixon, an

extensive image gallery, including on-set photographs, storyboards and original production documentation, theatrical trailer and more. Kudos to Arrow for rescuing this reel rarity.

### KINO LORBER FILMS

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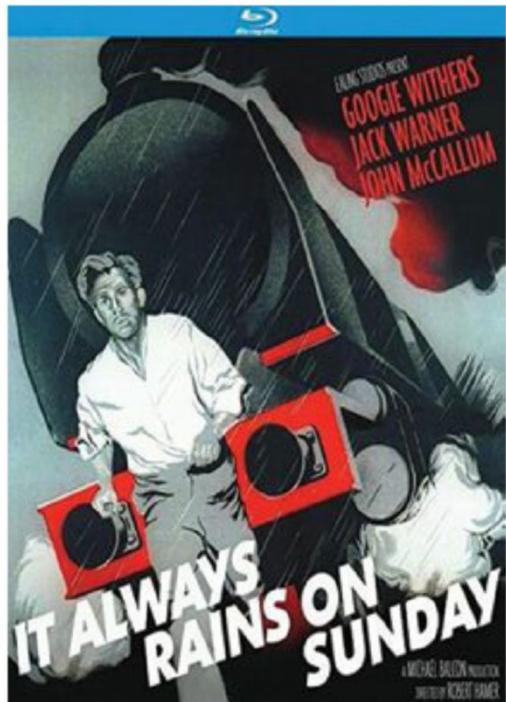
#### IT ALWAYS RAINS ON SUNDAY (1947) 8 8 8 1/2

D: Robert Hamer. Googie Withers, Jack Warner, John McCallum, Edward Chapman, Susan Shaw, Patricia Plunkett. 92 mins.

Working from Arthur La Bern's novel, director Hamer, late of the influential fright anthology **Dead of Night** and two years shy of his black comedy triumph **Kind Hearts and Coronets**, fashions a brilliant day-in-the-life mosaic featuring a large, colorful cast of postwar East Enders. At the center of the activity is Rose (**Dead of Night** alum Withers), a bright, attractive woman who's settled for a life of secure drudgery as the wife of decent but dull older bloke George (Chapman) and stepmother to his grown daughters, daring Vi (Shaw) and the more sedate Doris (Plunkett). Rose's rather dreary, chore-driven and, as per the title, sporadically damp day is dramatically interrupted by the unexpected appearance of former flame and current fugitive Tommy Swann (McCallum), target of an intensive manhunt led locally by Sergeant Fothergill (Warner). While Rose reluctantly hides Tommy, the action fans out to depict a wide cross-section of characters, from a trio of petty crooks looking in vain to unload a cache of stolen roller skates (!) to a pair of shady entrepreneur brothers to restless kids searching for ways to break the boredom, among many more. Hamer and ace cinematographer Douglas (**Raiders of the Lost Ark**) Slocombe lead us on an intimate tour of the nabe's noisy pubs and busy penny arcades (where an array of vintage coin-op machines are on display), smoky dance clubs, people-choked street bazaars, and even an outdoor boxing match (fixed, natch). The camera keeps returning to our core story—a tense, conflicted Rose's efforts to save a desperate Tommy, who hopes to make it to a nearby ship and safe passage to Capetown before his luck runs out. The pic culminates in an intricately staged chase through a nocturnal railroad yard, a dynamic exercise in editing wizardry. Hamer and crew's riveting blend of kitchen-sink drama and gripping crime tale deserves to be far better known, a goal that Kino's sharp Blu-ray should go a long way in achieving. Extras include a brace of fascinating featurettes, **Coming in from the Rain: Revisiting It Always Rains on Sunday and Locations**, along with an audio commentary by film historian Imogen Sara Smith, and theatrical trailer.

#### MADIGAN (1968) 8 8 8

D: Don Siegel. Richard Widmark, Henry Fonda, Inger Stevens, Harry Guardino, James Whitmore, Susan Clark, Don Stroud. 101 mins.



Of the two Don Siegel-directed policiers costarring Susan Clark and Don Stroud and centering on lawmen pursuing a fugitive in NYC that we saw on 42<sup>nd</sup> St. during their initial 1968 runs, the Clint Eastwood showcase **Coogan's Bluff**, released in March of that year, remains our fave. Runner-up **Madigan**, co-scripted by longtime blacklist victim Abraham (**Force of Evil**) Polonsky and issued that October, places a fairly distant second but still boasts ample virtues of its own, chief among them Widmark's earnest portrayal of the eponymous NYPD detective. When petty criminal turned murder suspect Benny Benesch (Steve Ihnat) gets the drop on Madigan and partner Rocco Bonaro (Guardino), relieving them of their guns before escaping, Commissioner Anthony X. Russell (Fonda) puts the shamed pair on 24/7 duty to apprehend the felon. While the two work through street contacts like pimp/informer Hughie (Stroud, who'd taken the fugitive role in **Coogan's Bluff**), the script injects unnecessary soap opera elements, like Russell's clandestine affair with a married woman (Clark, Clint's love interest in **Coogan's Bluff**) and Madigan's perennial friction with his dissatisfied spouse (Stevens). The action reheats in the film's later reels as the cops draw closer to their sociopathic prey. Visually, **Madigan**, photographed by camera king Russell (**Touch of Evil**) Metty, reps an unusually awkward mix of legit Fun City exteriors and obvious sanitized studio streets that detracts from the intended realism. While **Madigan** doesn't rate among Siegel's best, it's a slick effort that crime-film fans won't want to miss. Look for the late Michael Dunn as bookie Midget Castiglione. Extras on Kino's Blu-ray include a commentary track by Howard S. Berger, Steve Mitchell and Nathaniel Thompson. Kino also intros the superior 1973 Siegel caper **Charley Varrick**, starring Walter Matthau. 8

—The Phantom

## PHANTOM PHLASHEs!

Among the more intriguing genre titles newly arriving on Blu-ray and DVD, we find Anne-Sophie Dutoit's small-town shocker **Ballet Blanc** (Indican Pictures), Warner Home Entertainment's belated **The Shining** follow-up **Doctor Sleep**, starring Ewan McGregor, the Dark Sky Films duo **The Girl on the Third Floor**, starring wrestler C.M. Punk, and Perry Blackshear's Brit supernatural scarefest **The Siren**, Willem Dafoe and Robert Pattinson in the New England-set **The Lighthouse** (Lionsgate), Bong Soo Han's darkly satiric South Korean thriller **Parasite** (Universal Pictures Home Entertainment), a pair of chillers from Cinedigm, **The Tresspassers** and **Depraved**, the vampire outing **The Shed** (RLJ Entertainment), and **No Sin Unpunished** (Monarch Home Entertainment).

Two venerable franchises, meanwhile, may be taking their final bows—**Rambo: Last Blood** (Lionsgate), starring series founder Sylvester Stallone, and the box-office underachiever **Terminator Dark Fate** (Paramount), reuniting original killing machine Arnold Schwarzenegger and heroine Linda Hamilton. Also on the way are Edward Norton's 1950s-set crime saga **Motherless Brooklyn** (Warner), featuring Bruce Willis, and the Jackie Chan demon-hunting epic **The Knight of Shadows** (Well Go USA). ♀

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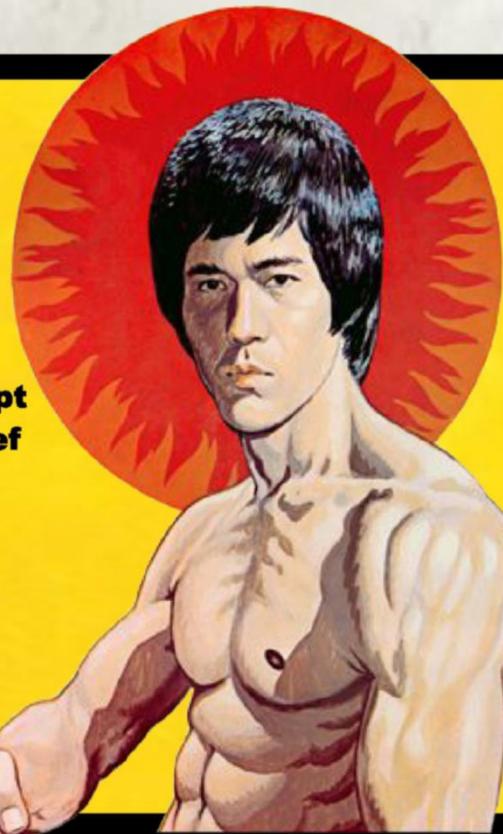
- ♀ The dynamic dad-daughter duo of **Terry & Tiffany DuFoe** run the award-winning Internet radio station **Cult Radio A-Go-Go!**  
♀ **Ronald Charles Epstein**'s book reviews are quoted on Amazon.ca.  
♀ **Tim Ferrante** is sitting by the window with his new Bigfoot binocs.  
♀ **Robert Freese** is waiting for the drive-ins to reopen.  
♀ Scope out **Joe Kane**'s tome **Found Footage: How the Astronauts Saved My Life and Other Tales of Movie Madness**.  
♀ **Eric Li** is the editor of **scariest-things.com** and host of that site's The Scariest Things podcast.  
♀ **Nancy Naglin**'s latest book, **The Salvation Army Tales**, is available from amazon.com.  
♀ Writer **David-Elijah Nahmod** embraces his geekhood.  
♀ **Joseph Perry** covers the international film festival front.  
♀ **John Seal** is waiting till it's safe to go back in the water.  
♀ **Bill Timoney** can be seen in Martin Scorsese's new all-star crime epic **The Irishman**.  
♀ **Don Vaughan** is the author of **Reel Tears: The Beverly Washburn Story** (BearManor Media).  
♀ **Scott Voisin**'s **Character Kings 2** is available from BearManor Media.  
♀ **Chris Weatherspoon** is a genre-film journalist based in Korea.
- ♀
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